

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL RETENTION IN AN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

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The issue of principal retention remains a challenge for many school districts across the United States. Several studies have revealed alarming statistics regarding principal turnover and attrition and the negative effects these issues have on schools (Browne-Ferrigno & Johnson-Fusarelli, 2005; Clark et al., 2009; Partlow & Ridenour, 2008; Stoelinga et al., 2008; Walker & Qian, 2006; Whittal, 2002). Data show that the annual financial burden principal replacement places on these school districts is enormous (School Leaders Network, 2014); not to mention the tremendous effect that principal turnover has on school operations. Consistent school leadership is essential to the successful operation of schools. Evidence indicates that principals are the most importance catalysts for change in the school building—they spark academic success among students, improve working conditions, and encourage teacher retention (Beteille et al., 2012; Burkhauser, 2015; Johnson, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2006; McIver et al., 2009).

This qualitative study examined the unique sociocultural, pedagogical, and personal factors that influence middle school principals' decision to remain within a given school. Data were gathered from interviews with ten middle school principals with an average of 7.1 years in their position at the time of the study and a range of 2-14 years of experience as school leaders. Their tenure in the principalship far exceeded that of many middle school principals today.

The study revealed that the participants' decision to remain in their positions at the same schools for a prolonged period was influenced by several factors, including the socio-economic, racial, and ethnic composition of the student bodies; positive relationships with students, parents, and direct supervisors. Contrary to findings in other studies, the principals who participated in this inquiry truly enjoyed working with traditionally underserved populations. Additionally, most respondents viewed their work through an altruistic lens; genuinely valued their relationships with students, parents, and teachers; and approached each day with the perspective that each of these groups deserved the very best that the principals had to offer. Moreover, the participants consciously viewed students and their parents as a unit, and saw the family unit as a valuable stakeholder in the school building.

AN ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL RETENTION IN URBAN  
SCHOOL DISTRICTS

by

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my beautiful daughter, Niya Selena Cyrus. I am very proud of you and all that you have accomplished in your life thus far. Do not let anyone tell you what you can or cannot accomplish. Remember to always aim high. As I have told you many times; shoot for the moon, and if you miss, at least you will be amongst the stars. I love you!!

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## **Section I: Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

In a recent MetLife (2013) survey of 500 K-12 public school principals, 32% of principals reported that they were very likely (18%) or fairly likely (14%) to leave the principalship in the next five years. According to the School Leaders Network (2014), half of all new principals leave their position after the third year. Data from the school district that was the focus of this study, hereafter referred to as the Northern Dancer Public School District (NDPSD), shows that the district has experienced high levels of principal turnover in recent years. Between 2009 and 2012, the principal turnover rate in NDPSD was 49.5%. In 2011 alone, the principal turnover rate reached its apex in the district, topping off at 21%. Moreover, in 2013, approximately 47% of the principals in NDPSD had five or less years of experience in the principalship (NDPSD, 2013). In fact, in 2011, the average tenure of principals in the lowest-performing schools in NDPSD was approximately one year. Conversely, in the highest-performing schools in the system, data from the same year showed that principals had been on the job an average of 11.8 years (NDPSD, 2011).

Recently, scholars have conducted a great deal of research to understand school teachers and strategies that can ensure their retention, development, and success in the classroom (Doney, 2013; Riggs, 2013; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Shaw & Newton 2014; Varlas, 2013). Further, studies have revealed high attrition rates for classroom teachers, particularly those in the early stages of their careers and have spurred the development of mentoring, support and professional development programs (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Leukens, Lyter, &

Fox, 2004). In contrast, few studies have examined principal turnover and few researchers have explored the factors that contribute to turnover or to its prevention. Most of the research in this domain has taken place at the state or multi-state level (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002) and has not focused on principal attrition at the district or system level.

Because of the crucial role that principals play in a school's success, the high attrition rate for these school leaders is a major concern for many school systems across the nation. Each year, the annual principal turnover rate in the United States ranges from 25-30% (Beteille, Kalagrides, & Loeb, 2012). For example, the annual principal turnover rate in Miami has hovered around 22%, and turnover rates exceeded 20% in Milwaukee, New York City, and San Francisco (Beteille et al., 2012). In Chicago, 25% of 423 principals surveyed stated that they planned to leave the principalship in the next year, and 40% stated they planned to leave in the next three years (The Chicago Public Education Fund, 2015). Most notably, the largest state in the union, Texas, registered a 30% turnover rate (Beteille et al., 2012). Researchers have found high rates of principal turnover to be especially prevalent in secondary schools that serve students from low-income and minority households (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Guarino, Ghosh-Dastidar, & Brown, 2006; Loeb, Kalogrides, & Hornig 2010; Ringel, Gates, Chung, Brown, & Ghosh-Dastidar, 2004).

Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) found that the length of a principal's tenure in the United States is three to four years for the average school, but is even shorter for principals serving in low-income and minority communities. Moreover, a 2012 report published by the RAND Corporation indicated

that, 20% of principals in urban districts that were new to their schools in that year left their posts within one or two years, leaving behind schools that generally continued a downward academic slide after their departure (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012). Research has shown that schools that experience repeated principal changes, whether voluntary or involuntary, are often devoid of the necessary leadership stability that is necessary to succeed and sustain long-term school improvement efforts (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013, Burkhauser, et al., 2012, Vanderhaar, Munoz & Rodosky, 2006). Data also shows schools that experience high rates principal attrition also demonstrate high rates of teacher turnover and low levels of student achievement (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller, 2009; Partlow, 2007; Weinstein, Jacobowitz, Landon, & Schwartz, 2009).

### **The Consequences of Principal Attrition**

Existing research clearly demonstrates the significance impact that a principal's leadership can have on whether a school reaches its stated goals. Several large-scale studies have established that principals are responsible for creating an environment that is hospitable to student learning and one that promotes teacher growth (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Foster, 2005; Fuller & Young 2010; Hallinger, 2005; Seashore-Louis et al., 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Researchers have also found that as the level of influence that principals have on the success of their schools grows, so too do the complex challenges that they face each year (Beteille, et al., 2012; Fuller & Young, 2010; Miller, 2009; Seashore-Louis et al. 2010). Increasingly, principals must confront issues of increasingly diverse student bodies, changing school environments, higher accountability standards, new curricular mandates, teacher shortages, and budgetary cuts (Baker,

Punswick & Belt, 2010). At the same time, principals must focus an inordinate amount of their time on providing instructional leadership for the school, hiring and mentoring new teachers, developing a school-wide vision, improving academic achievement, and acting as the school's chief disciplinarian and fiduciary agent (Fuller & Young, 2010; Meador, 2016; Richards, 2000). According to the National Conferences of State Legislatures (2002), this confluence of responsibilities and expectations, coupled with job-related stress, has contributed significantly to the increase in principal turnover at the secondary level across the United States.

Studies have shown that the continuous increases in principal mobility and turnover often create very serious challenges for schools and districts, particularly because of the impact that these high turnover levels can have on the leadership stability that schools need to be successful (Baker, et al, 2010; Gates, et al. 2006; Loeb, et al, 2010, Weinstein, et al, 2009). Several researchers (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Fuller & Young, 2009; Ringel, et al. 2004; Vanderhaar, et al. 2006; Weinstein, et al., 2009) have also agreed that most principals need a minimum of five years on the job to hone the skills necessary to develop school cultures that (a) encourage positive student growth, (b) foster parent involvement, (c) support teacher development, and (d) advance school improvement initiatives. Constant principal turnover often prevents productive school improvement efforts from taking root and adversely affects student achievement (Weinstein, et al., 2009).

Several scholars have also noted a correlation between principal turnover and teacher retention. The data indicate that schools that have difficulty retaining principals usually have difficulty retaining their teachers, as well (Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller,

2009; Plecki, Elfers, Loeb, Zahir, & Knapp (2005); Stoelinga, Hart, & Schalliol, 2008; Weinstein et al., 2009;). Plecki and colleagues studied principal and teacher retention over a five-year span in 416 schools in Washington State and found a significant causal relationship between high principal mobility and low teacher retention. Similarly, Miller noted that teacher turnover in North Carolina between 1994 and 2006 was substantially higher during the same year a principal left a school and the subsequent year following the assignment of a new principal. These numbers were higher than the schools' baseline teacher turnover rate (Miller, 2009).

Researchers have also established a connection between principal stability and student achievement (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009; Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller, 2009; Vanderhaar et al., 2006). Miller, for example, argued that principal mobility negatively affected the statewide math and reading exam scores of middle and elementary students in North Carolina. Miller noted that student scores were lower during a new principal's first two years than they were during the tenure of the previous principals. Subsequently, test scores began to show signs of rebounding at the end of the new principal's fourth year at schools.

Weinstein et al. (2009) provided yet another illustration of how principal stability affects student outcomes. The researchers found that in newly-built New York City high schools, between 1993 and 1998, students' graduation and dropout rates, as well as the number of students that passed English and mathematics Regents exams, decreased after the transition of the founding principal. Vanderhaar et al. (2006) and Fuller and Young (2009) also found that principal stability had some bearing on students' academic performance. They noted that principals needed to be at the same school for seven or



more years to bring about effective change (Fuller & Young, 2009; Vanderhaar et al. 2006). Each of these studies asserted that principals serve as the main catalyst for creating school conditions that facilitate teaching and learning.

Finally, the financial burden high principal turnover places on school districts across the nation is enormous. Districts invest large sums of financial and human capital into the recruitment, hiring, and training of new principals. According to the School Leaders Network (SLN) (2014), in less affluent and harder-to-staff school districts, the financial costs are usually higher because turnover rates in urban school districts are often 10-15% higher than are those in more affluent districts. SLN (2014), also noted that it now cost school districts and estimated \$75,000 to hire, train, and place each principal. For a typical urban district of 110 schools, SLN estimated that investing in efforts to reduce the turnover rate of principals (30-35% turnover) to levels commensurate with those of more affluent districts (20% turnover) would save the urban districts \$330,000 annually. Apply the same metrics to just the 500 largest districts in the US, and it would save these districts collectively over \$100 million annually in principal replacement costs (SNL, 2014). In addition to these direct costs, the time and energy that urban districts invest in building principals' leadership capacity is usually lost when they decide to leave the district, state, or the principalship altogether (Fuller & Young, 2009).

### **Scope of the Problem in NDPSD**

Data indicate that in NDPSD, middle schools have experienced high rates of principal attrition over the last ten years (Table 1). Moreover, from 2006 to 2017, only five middle schools have retained their principal for five or more years. Similarly, from 2006 to 2017, there were 92 principal changes in the 24 middle schools that housed

Grades 6-8, or just Grades 7 and 8 (NDPSD, 2017). These figures equate to each middle school changing its principal every 3.88 years.

Table 1

*NDPSD Middle School Principal Changes 2006-2017*

<i>Name of school</i>	<i>Number of principal changes</i>	<i>Year of last principal change</i>
<i>Sadlers Wells</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2017</i>
<i>Galileo MS</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2003</i>
<i>Pour Moi MS</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2017</i>
<i>Treve MS</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2017</i>
<i>New Approach MS</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2017</i>
<i>Carnegie MS</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2007</i>
<i>Danzig MS</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2015</i>
<i>Harzand MS</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2015</i>
<i>El Gran Senor MS</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2013</i>
<i>Lyphard MS</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2012</i>
<i>Nijinsky MS</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2014</i>
<i>Nureyev MS</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2017</i>
<i>Lammtara MS</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2011</i>
<i>Secreto MS</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2010</i>
<i>Old Vic MS</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2014</i>
<i>Salsibil MS</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>2016</i>
<i>Montjeu MS</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2017</i>
<i>Camelot MS</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2011</i>
<i>Australia MS</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2016</i>
<i>Frankel MS</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2015</i>
<i>See the Stars MS</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2014</i>
<i>The Minstrel MS</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2014</i>
<i>Slip Anchor MS</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2013</i>
<i>Mill Reef MS</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2015</i>

Source: NDPSD Human Resources Report.

These turnover rates are similar those published by researchers from Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) in 2007. According to ACY (2007b), between 2002 and 2007, 79% of middle schools in NDPSD changed principals at least one time. Further, 57% of the middle schools experienced two or more changes in leadership, and one school changed principals five times during that five-year span. The data also show that there have been 28 principal changes in the six middle schools classified as “turn-around-schools” by the state for demonstrating subpar student achievement results in reading and mathematics on the Maryland State Assessments (MSA). One such school changed principals six times from 2006 to 2014. In 2010, the school even adopted a co-principal model, which lasted until 2012 (McMurrer, 2012). The MSA data from 2009 -2012 show that the students made a six and 11-point gain in seventh and eighth grade mathematics, respectively. However, seventh grade reading remained the same and eighth grade reading decline by two percentage points (Maryland Report Card, 2015). This further supports the notion that principals need five to seven years at a school to establish a culture that supports student achievement (Fuller & Young, 2009; Vanderhaar, et al., 2006; Weinstein, et al., 2009)

Further, from 2006 to 2014, NDPSD middle school students (Grades 6-8) performed well below the state average on the MSA.

Table 2

*NDPSD v. The State Performance on the Maryland State Assessment (MSA)*

Student performance on the MSA by year									
Grade level	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Grade 6 Math (NDPSD)	55.3	56.1	67.1	67.5	73.3	72.7	76.5	71.1	56.8

Grade 6 Reading (NDPSD)	62.1	69.7	74.5	76.0	81.1	68.1	79.3	78.6	78.0
Grade 6 math (State)	65.5	71.9	75.8	76.0	79.8	82.0	83.1	77.1	67.8
Grade 6 Reading (State)	71.9	76.5	81.7	83.3	86.1	83.8	84.5	84.1	83.3
Grade 7 Math (NDPSD)	45.8	46.0	53.7	53.1	53.7	59.7	61.0	57.2	47.8
Grade 7 Reading (NDPSD)	56.3	57.7	69.7	70.7	69.1	75.1	71.0	77.1	71.5
Grade 7 math (State)	60.1	61.2	78.2	72.0	72.6	74.3	77.4	72.6	63.1
Grade 7 Reading (State)	71.1	70.2	81.2	81.8	82.9	84.0	81.2	85.0	78.7
Grade 8 Math (NDPSD)	33.9	37.6	42.4	43.2	41.1	43.5	50.3	51.8	41.4
Grade 8 Reading (NDPSD)	51.2	53.0	56.7	67.3	66.9	70.8	69.6	71.4	67.6
Grade 8 math (State)	55.0	56.7	61.8	65.7	65.4	66.1	69.3	67.0	58.7
Grade 8 Reading (State)	67.0	68.2	72.8	80.2	80.3	82.7	80.8	81.0	76.9

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Source: Maryland State Department of Education – Division of Curriculum, Assessment, and Accountability (April 10, 2016). Maryland State Assessment Trends by Test Administration Year.

Table 2 shows, a comparison of the statewide MSA data from 2006-2014 showed that NDPSD students in Grade 6 (74.1% proficient) preformed an average of 7.5 points below the state average (81.6% proficient) in reading and 9.2 points (66.2% proficient) below the state average (75.4% proficient) in mathematics. Similarly, Grade 7 students (68.3% proficient) performed an average of 11.2 points below the state average (79.5% proficient) in reading and 17 points (53.1% proficient) below the state average (70.1%

proficient) in mathematics. Eighth students from NDPSD fared no better than their sixth and seventh grade counterparts (see Table 2). These students (63.8% proficient) scored 12.8 points below the state average (76.6% proficient) in reading and 20 points (42.8% proficient) below the state average (62.8% proficient) in mathematics (Maryland Report Card, 2015).

The instability of the principalship at the middle school level in NDPSD could certainly help to explain why NDPSD middle school achievement levels have lagged well behind the state's average for nearly 10 years. As previously mentioned, there have been over 90 changes in principals alone at the middle school level between 2006 and 2017 in NDPSD. Furthermore, several researchers (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Fuller & Young, 2009; McDonald, 2014; Ringel et al., 2004; Vanderhaar et al., (2006); Weinstein et al., 2009) have agreed that a principal's length of tenure at a school plays a significant role in student achievement outcomes.

### **Significance of the Study**

Existing literature revealed several reasons for the high rates of principal turnover and mobility; chief among them are retirement, school demographics, school size, salary, increased accountability measures, and job stress (Battle & Gruber, 2010; Beteille, et al., 2012; Cushing, 2003; Goldring & Taie, 2014; Metlife, 2013; Riley, 2014). In 2010, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published the results from their 2008-09 Principal Attrition and Mobility Survey, which revealed that of the over 117,000 individuals who served as principals of public, Bureau of Indian Education-funded (BIE), and private institutions in the US during the 2007-08 school year, 80% remained at the same school during the following school year ("stayers"), 6% moved to different schools

(“movers”), 12% left the principalship altogether (“leavers”), and 3% did not report their occupational status after leaving (Battle & Gruber, 2010).

In a related study, Baker and his colleagues (2010) used Missouri administrative data to study the mobility of 2700 principals in the state. The researchers examined data from three cohorts of principals from 1999, 2000, and 2001. They found that over an eight-year period in Missouri, middle school principals were 33% less likely to remain in the same school than were their elementary and high school counterparts. In Texas, Fuller (2012) found that only one of every three newly hired middle school principals stayed in the same school beyond three years. Researchers from three different studies indicated that personal demographics like age, gender, and race, as well as the racial composition of each school’s student body, were factors that contributed to the principals’ departures (Battle & Gruber, 2010, Baker et al., 2010; Fuller, 2012).

In 2014, NCES published the results from their 2012-13 follow-up to the 2008-09 survey, and the new data indicated that of the over 114,000 public and private school principals who were on the job during the 2011-12 school year, 78% of them were stayers, 6% were movers, and 12% were leavers. Additionally, 5% of the principals who left the principalship fell into the “other” category, as they worked in schools that were not able to corroborate their current occupational status (Goldring & Taie, 2014). At the school level, the NCES data showed that of the nearly 14,000 middle school principals surveyed, 76.9% were stayers, 8.5% were movers, 11.7% were leavers, and 2.9% did not report their employment status (Goldring & Taie, 2014). The data also revealed that the percentage of middle school principals (20.2%) who moved to another school or left the principalship altogether was higher than that of their primary school (17.4%) and high

school (18.9%) counterparts (Goldring & Taie, 2014). Remarkably, data from both studies showed similar results: School districts across the country are losing 20 to 25 percent of their principals annually (Battle, 2010; Goldring & Taie 2014).

While the previously mentioned studies examined principal attrition and turnover data from a national prospective, it is worthwhile to examine data at the state level. In Maryland, Researchers from Advocates for Children & Youth (2007a) found that from 2002 to 2007, 90% of the public middle schools in Baltimore City experienced at least one principal change, 80% had two or more principal changes, and 50% experienced three or more principal changes during that time.

In Illinois, DeAngelis and White (2011) examined the job movement of 7075 principals in the state between 2001-2008. They found that the turnover rate in Illinois for all principals (including first-year principals) during the target period (2001-2008) had significantly increased to 21.9% compared to the 14% turnover rate that was reported between 1987 and 2001 in an earlier study conducted by Ringel, et al. (2004). Forty percent of the principals who left between 2001 and 2007 exited the Illinois Public School System (IPS) altogether, 27% moved to schools either in their current district or another district, and 33% moved to a non-principal position within the district (DeAngelis & White, 2011). Most significantly, the researchers found that over 72% of Illinois principals who changed jobs between 2001-2007 moved to a central office job, an additional 11% took a demotion to become assistant principals, and 10% took a classroom teacher position in IPS (DeAngelis & White, 2011). Again, the authors cited several individual factors (i.e., race, age, gender, years of experience) and school factors (i.e., size, level, AYP status, location) as reasons for principal attrition. Interestingly, the

data also revealed that principals were more likely to stay in a school if they shared the same race as the dominant racial group of the students in the school. (DeAngelis & White, 2011).

Although several researchers have identified patterns of principal turnover (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; DeAngelis & White, 2011; Fuller & Young, 2009; Gates et al., 2004; Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002; Weinstein et al., 2009), few have examined the underlying reasons for the mobility or sought to understand individual principals' perspectives regarding these trends. Fuller and Young (2009) stated the need to understand the reasons beyond high middle school principal turnover and called for further qualitative studies that would render more detailed analyses and provide a deeper understanding about why principals leave their schools. However, because there is an abundance of research (Beteille et al., 2012; Branch, et al., 2013; Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller, 2009; Miller 2013; Seashore-Louis et al., 2010; Weinstein et al., 2009) that supports the notion that having strong and effective principals in schools is one of the most important factors that contributes to a school's success, perhaps researchers should pay more attention to principals who stay at their schools and examine why these leaders choose to remain in their positions.

Thus, exploring the reasons middle school principals stay in their positions is critical because there is a dearth of knowledge regarding factors that encourage such professionals to establish a long tenure. A review of the literature revealed numerous studies on leadership and the challenges of the principalship; however, very few researchers have focused their efforts specifically on middle school leaders (Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, DuCette, & Gross, 2006; Gale & Bishop 2014), even though the



warning bells begin to chime for potential high school dropouts as early as sixth grade (Balfanz, Hertzog & Mac Iver, 2007). Moreover, as noted by the National Middle School Association, middle school leaders are the agents that can bring about the changes in school culture necessary to boost teacher effectiveness and elevate student achievement. Thus, middle school principals must have a profound understanding of the specific needs of middle grade students and the teachers that instruct them (Association for Middle Level Education, 2012).

The handful of studies in existence offer worthy findings about middle school leadership (Gale & Bishop, 2014). For example, in their 2004 study on middle-level principal preparation and licensure, Anfara and Valentine (2004) found “approximately twice as many principals of highly effective middle schools had majored in middle level education at the master’s, specialist, or doctoral level than their counterparts in the national sample” (p. 7). Additionally, Clark and Clark (2008) noted that principals who led highly successful middle schools had a greater depth of knowledgeable around middle school practices and had taken significantly more course work in middle level education than did their less successful counterparts.

Furthermore, research shows that most middle school leaders attain their positions having very little or, in some cases, no prior administrative proficiency with middle school issues (Anfara & Valentine, 2004; NASSP, 2006). In the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a mere 4% of all middle school principals had an administration certification that was specific to middle school (Valentine, Clark, Hackman, & Petzko, 2002). Moreover, Valentine et al. found that only a few middle level leaders arrived on the job having taken extra course work that explored middle school concepts. Additionally, in their qualitative

studies on preparation of middle level leaders, Anfara and Brown (2003) noted the perspective of one study participant that reflected the lack of focus on middle school principal development at the college and university levels:

I went through my entire college training program for administration and did not even hear the words “middle school philosophy.” I started as a middle school principal and had no idea what exploratory curriculum was, what advisories were, and how to organize teachers into effective, functioning teams. (p. 8)

According to Anfara et al., in 2006, only seven states (Alaska, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, and Oklahoma) had universities that provided any special principal preparation programs that specifically targeted middle school leaders, and only five of the states mandated that individuals acquire a middle level certificate to become a principal of a middle school. However, a closer examination of the data revealed that most of the institutions in these states offered only a limited array of courses that focused on middle level education; and in most of these states, administrators only must complete a middle school internship (Anfara et al., 2006). Anfara et al. (2006) concluded that preparation programs for middle school principals that require specific course work and internships that focus the characteristics and needs of young adolescents should be mandatory for future middle level leaders.

Swaim and Kinney (2010) espoused similar sentiments after their survey of middle school principals who were noted for producing excellent results in their school systems. The researchers found that having the requisite knowledge of middle level education practices was essential to school leaders’ ability to promote positive school improvement outcomes. They asserted, “It takes the skill and commitment of an effective

leader to create a whole school of excellence that promotes the academic growth of every student entrusted in its care” (Swaim & Kinney, 2010, p.8).

This study will provide an avenue for middle school principals in NDPSD to shed light, in their own voices, on the individual and institutional factors that affect their decision to stay in their current positions and schools. This inquiry will contribute to the growing body of research on principal retention by sharing the perspectives and modes of thinking expressed by middle school principals regarding their decisions to maintain the leadership continuity at their respective schools. As school districts across the nation continue to grapple with the difficulties of recruiting, hiring, and retaining quality leaders in their systems, this research will provide some understanding of the experiences of individuals who have successfully led their schools for an uncommon length of time.

### **Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this section of Chapter I is to review the relevant literature related to principal attrition, mobility, turnover and retention. The major themes that will be discussed in this section are: (a) the ever-changing role of the principalship; (b) the importance of principal leadership; (c) the impact of principal turnover on schools; (d) factors associated with principal attrition, mobility, and turnover; (e) research studies related to principal attrition, mobility, turnover; (f) factors that encourage principal retention; and (g) efforts to solve the principal attrition and turnover issue.

Several researchers have asserted that to have an outstanding school, one must have an exceptional principal at the helm (Beteille et al., 2012; Branch et al., 2013; Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller, 2013; Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). One cannot understate the direct or indirect role that the principal plays in influencing school culture, staff morale,

student achievement, parent satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and stability in leadership is essential ingredient to the success of schools (Coelli & Green, 2012; Fuller & Young, 2009; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Miller, 2013; Vanderhaar et al., 2006). The presence of a great principal is usually the antecedent to high staff morale, increased student learning, satisfied parents, and a thriving school culture (Coelli & Green, 2012). Conversely, Leithwood et al. (2010) noted, without a competent, skilled leader, the likelihood of maintaining a positive school culture that supports student learning would be very difficult, if not nearly impossible.

This knowledge of the strong influence that a principal has on the success of a school, makes more concerning recent research that has revealed a steady decline in the tenure of principals, especially among those at the secondary levels and who are new to the profession (Beteille et al., 2012; Burkhauser et al., 2012; Burkhauser 2015; Fuller & Young, 2009; Gates et al., 2006). Moreover, at this point in the nation's history, it has become increasingly important that school districts go beyond recruiting and hiring the best possible principal candidates to find new and innovative ways to keep these quality leaders in their schools long enough to implement the changes necessary to ensure long-term success for teachers and students (Mana, 2015).

**The ever-changing role of the principalship.** Studies show that being a school principal has always been a very difficult job (Burkhauser, et al., 2012), but recent increases in accountability have made the role even more challenging, as the stakes are higher than ever before (Alvoid & Black, 2014). As the role of the principalship evolves, school districts across the country must adjust to address an array of persistent challenges including the growing diversity across urban, suburban and rural school districts (Mana,

2015). To ensure the recruitment of individuals who can meet these challenges, and to attract the best possible candidates for school leadership roles, NDPSD has revised the job description for the principalship twice since 2012. For example, the language in the 2012 principal job description now includes language that stresses the importance of instructional leadership, leadership development, cultural diversity, exercising good judgment, professional development, and innovative thinking (NDPSD, 2016). In addition, principals must be skilled at creating a team that works collaboratively, implementing curriculum, working with culturally diverse populations, and building strong community partnerships (NDPSD, 2016).

Prior to the 1960s, principals were only responsible for managing the daily operations of the schoolhouse, providing student discipline, supervising teachers, and implementing central office directives. Principals were essentially building managers who were more concerned with operational and district compliance issues than teacher development and student learning. Hallinger (1992) noted that during the 1960s and 1970s, the principalship resembled the role of a program manager who was responsible for complying with and implementing an increasingly growing list of federally-funded mandates. Hallinger underscored two points regarding the role of the principal during this time:

- a. Principals were “limited to managing the implementation of an externally devised solution to a social or educational problem,” and
- b. Principals engendered a “pattern of managerial behavior that was often unwittingly encouraged by program evaluations, which typically demonstrated

a concern for compliance criteria rather than for student or program outcomes.” (p. 2)

In the 1970s, principals began to take on a new role as school improvement initiatives began to take hold. The federal, state, and local mandates began to focus on new curricular initiatives that centered around math and science and placed a new emphasis on bilingual and special education. This programmatic shift required more collaboration between individual principals and their central office counterparts. Hallinger (1992) noted that “by the mid- 1970s, relatively few American principals could avoid the responsibilities that came with program and curriculum management” (p. 2). Moreover, this shift in the landscape became the foundation for a new model that featured the principal as the central instructional leader in schools and as a catalyst of change.

The notion of the school principal as the lead instructional authority in schools was solidified during the 1980s and 1990s. During that time, the federal government introduced significant education reforms that began to take root throughout the country, and the term “instructional leader” replaced the descriptor “curriculum supervisor” as a characterization of the principal’s role. However, the practical implications of this change were somewhat ambiguous. To bring clarity and consistency to the principal’s role as instructional leader, Hallinger (1992) clarified, “High expectations for teachers and students, close supervision of classroom instruction, coordination of the school’s curriculum, and close monitoring of student progress became synonymous with the role of an instructional leader” (p. 3).

The final product of President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education was the landmark report entitled, *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983). The report also served as a catalyst for changes in the role of the principal. In one of the most notable quotes from the report, Gardner offered the following:

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (p. 6)

Gardner's indictment of the U.S. public school system contributed to the notion that America's schools were failing and served as the impetus for the education reform and the standards movements of the 1980s and 1990 at the federal, state, and local levels. The report recommended strengthening graduation requirements and curriculum content, adopting more rigorous and measurable standards for students, and devoting greater time to instruction through extended school days and years for students. These efforts had a great impact on the role of the school principal.

In 1994, President William Jefferson Clinton signed the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (1994), which enabled the federal government to devise an expansive approach to refining public education in the United States. The goals of this legislation set the stage for another shift in the role of the principal for the ensuing decade. Principals had to shift even more of their focus to improving student achievement in

science and mathematics, increasing student graduation rates, preparing students for college and careers, providing professional development for teachers, and establishing parent and community partnerships (Austin, 2004).

That same year, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) adopted the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards for principals (Murphy, 2005). According to Murphy (2003), these standards represented “a concerted effort to rebuild the foundations of school administration, both within the practice and academic domains of the profession” (p. 1). As more states began to adopt the ISLLC standards, it became clear that principals would have to become more engaged in activities that focused on teaching, learning, and student achievement (Burke, Marx, & Lowenstein, 2012). Moreover, a shift in the educational landscape caused by the reform movement made principals more accountable for their students’ academic performance, and principals’ efforts to provide instructional leadership, foster a positive school climate and culture, motivate teachers and students, and distributing leadership in their schools came under greater scrutiny (Tirrozi, 2001). Hallinger (1992) predicted that the complex nature of the principalship, with its array of competing demands, would require more than simply arming principals with a more robust knowledge base. He contended that consistent changes in principal practices would not occur unless district leaders modified their practices to support principals in their instructional leadership role.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the role of the principal endured yet another change, as more rigorous school reform efforts began to take hold. Policy makers, school administrators, and other stakeholders concluded that fundamental change was necessary, because the current system of education in the United States was not properly preparing



students for college or the workforce (Leithwood, 1992). Reformers recommended that instructional decision making should reside on the campuses of schools rather than in central offices; and parents, teachers and community stakeholders should have broader authority in decision-making processes (Hallinger, 1992). Thus, the role of the principal morphed yet again to accommodate the tides of change.

As the educational reform movement continued, it was no longer enough for principals to be instructional leaders in their schools; they had to become more distributive in sharing the instructional, curricular, and leadership responsibilities with other individuals in the school building. In this context, state leaders, local school boards, and superintendents decided that those individuals (e.g., teachers and parents) who resided closest to the students should serve as important reservoirs of expertise and receive a larger voice in school improvement efforts (Hallinger, 1992). Hallinger (1992) explained that “by implication, the basis for school leadership expanded to include teachers, parents, and the principal. These facets highlighted a new role for principals and teachers in problem finding and problem solving, a role increasingly referred to as transformational leadership” (p. 6).

As the 21st century began, the role of the principalship underwent another transformation. A new era of accountability in education was born with the signing of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB; 2001) by President George W. Bush. The law was primarily aimed at improving student achievement and reducing the pervasive achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. The main goal of NCLB was to ensure that all students attained mastery on state-determined educational standards in math and reading by the end of the 2013-14 school term. Mastery would be determined

through schools' Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on standardized tests. Each year, student growth in reading and mathematics scores were expected to increase through 2014, when all students were expected to be proficient in reading and mathematics (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

For principals, it became abundantly clear that under NCLB, the responsibility for successful student achievement would rest squarely on their shoulders, and for the first time, federal legislation mandated that schools face consequences for not meeting prescribed student achievement goals. These consequences varied from replacing the principal and other members of a school's administration, to schools possibly being taken over by the state (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Moreover, this added accountability squarely placed school leaders at the head of the line for removal if student performance did not increase (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). If previous federal legislation had not yet done so, this newest statute solidified the shift in the primary role of principals from one of building manager to instructional and school improvement leader.

Less than 10 years after President Bush signed the NCLB Act (2001) into law, President Barack Obama authorized the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). One component of this historic legislation provided \$4.35 billion in competitive grant money for the Race to the Top Fund (RttT), which provided monetary incentives that encouraged and rewarded states that showed progress in improving student achievement, graduation rates, and college and career readiness (US Department of Education, 2009). Unlike NCLB, RttT was totally voluntary, in that states could choose to compete for funds. The idea of a national competition for states seeking monies

to address priorities established by the Department of Education was novel. While NCLB and RttT differed in notable ways, they both focused significantly on four key areas:

- standards and assessments,
- data and accountability,
- effective teachers and principals, and
- strategies for turning around low-performing schools (Lohman, 2010).

One of the most significant stipulations for applying for an RttT grant was that states could not establish legal or regulatory constraints on connecting student achievement and student growth data to individual principal and teacher evaluations. Thus, data on students would be a significant factor in teacher and principal evaluation systems (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). To be considered highly effective, principals would have to demonstrate high rates of growth among their student populations (Lohman, 2010). In addition, like NCLB, RttT required states to intervene with the most persistently failing schools and districts by using one of four turn-around models recommended by the federal government (i.e., turnaround, restart, or transformation models or school closure). These models call for the dismissal of ineffective principals once they have had sufficient opportunities to improve (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

These mandates have significantly contributed to the changing landscape of the principalship and placed even more significance on students' academic performance. To meet the new expectations, principals needed to improve upon their repertoire of skills related to data management, human capital development, and pedagogical knowledge. As Tirozzi (2001) asserted, "Principals need to acquire new skills and a new mindset to

understand and address the demographic, social, economic, and educational trends that are on the horizon” (p. 435). To meet the fundamental needs implicit in these themes, Tirozzi (2001) suggested that the principal’s role become more laser focused on instructional leadership that facilitated teaching and learning processes, with less attention placed on the managerial and administrative responsibilities of the job. Whether driven by internal or external forces, one could be certain that the complex and demanding nature of the principalship will become even more demanding as the role continued to evolve (Hull, 2012; Lattuca, 2012). As Tirozzi noted, “principals of tomorrow must become leaders of curricular change, innovative and diversified instructional leaders, data-driven decision makers, and implementers of accountability models for students and staff” (p. 438). Principals agreed with this description, with over 84% saying that being able to utilize student performance data to improve teacher instructional practices, as well as developing strong teacher capacity throughout the school, were the most significant issues for them (MetLife, 2013, p. 25).

This paradigm shift will require collaboration at local, state, federal levels of the education leadership spectrum. To ensure that existing and prospective principals acquired the requisite skills necessary for them to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Tirozzi (2001) made the following recommendations for districts, states, and institutions of higher learning:

- Transform principal preparation programs to ensure that individuals with school leadership experience are included in the instructional processes.
- Increase the availability of induction and mentoring programs for new principals.

- Increase funding to facilitate extensive and sustained professional development for new and veteran principals.
- Establish a national academy for school administrators like our military academies.
- Establish national board certification standards for recognizing exemplary principals like the National Board for Teaching Standards (p. 438).

**National efforts to standardize the principalship.** Over the past decade, policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels, along with leaders of professional educational organizations, have made several efforts to actualize Tirozzi's (2001) recommendations to improve the aptitude, capacity, and skills of those individuals who have and will continue to seek to enter the principalship. For example, Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) introduced S.3582 – Educator Preparation Reform Act that would have paved the way for the formation of a national principal preparation academy (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2012). The bill was introduced in the Senate in September 2012, read twice, and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (Senate Bill 3582, 2012). However, to date, the federal government has not yet established any type of national academy for school administrators.

In 2001, Tirozzi recommended establishing national board certification standards for recognizing exemplary principals. In 2009, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) announced such a plan for principals that would mirror the national board certification for teachers and professional school counselors. After nearly five years and a \$3.5 million investment, NBPTS's board of directors voted in 2012 to

scrap the program due to financial and administrative challenges. Thus, more than 200 principals who had participated in the first cohort of the national certification program did not receive their advanced certification (Maxwell, 2014).

As previously noted, Tirozzi (2001) contended that principals need to update their repertoire of skills to meet the demands of the changing educational landscape. As Manna (2015) noted, the population changes in our society, coupled with widespread advances in technology and countless new initiatives, present new challenges and underscore the need for additional training for school principals to help them run their schools in an effective manner. Manna also claimed that, without a concerted effort to prioritize high-quality and sustained professional development for principals and other school administrators, important initiatives and programs created by federal and state educational agencies and local school boards would likely be unsuccessful.

**Professional development to support principal growth.** Goldrick (2016) found that despite the ongoing need for a workforce of well-trained school administrators, many states had made only limited progress in their efforts to provide effective induction and mentoring programs for new principals and school leaders. To date, less than half of the states in the country require some sort of professional support for new principals (Goldrick, 2016). Specifically, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah all require a one-year induction program for new principals; and California, Hawaii, Missouri, New Jersey, and Vermont have two-year requirements.

Delaware is the only state that requires more than two years of professional development for new principals, while Colorado and Wisconsin have program

requirements, but do not specify a minimum length for the training. Pennsylvania also requires an induction program for new principals; however, the process can take place anytime in the principal's first five years in the position (Goldrick, 2016). According to Goldrick, "school administrators play a key role in new teachers' success and growth. When new teachers find supportive, skilled school leaders who can help them grow professionally and improve classroom instruction, they are more likely to stay at their schools and become better instructors themselves" (p. vi). All schools and students can certainly benefit from having effective school administrators and teachers; thus, high-quality induction programs can be a significant benefit particularly for individuals who serve in schools with disproportionately high numbers of minority and low-income students and high teacher turnover (Goldrick, 2016).

Since 2001, the nation's educators, parents, and students have been governed by NCLB (National Education Association, 2016). Most of the controversy surrounding NCLB focused on the federal government's influence over individual school systems around accountability standards. Educators and parents contended that the 2001 law granted the federal government too large a role in shaping educational reform policy across the country, and that it led to a lack of flexibility for individual school systems in determining the standards by which their schools and students should be measured (National Education Association, 2016).

In a dramatic shift in authority for public education, President Obama signed the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) into law in December 2015. According to the National Education Association (2016), "ESSA returns the decision-making for our nation's schools back where it belongs—in the hands of local educators, parents, and

communities-while keeping the focus on students most in need.” Through ESSA, lawmakers sought to ensure that states set high standards for student success, utilize resources to support their lowest-performing schools, provide access to high-quality preschools, develop less cumbersome and more efficient testing programs, and establish state and local evidence-based school improvement systems (U.S. Department of Education 2015).

One of the hallmarks of the ESSA is that states may now reserve up to an additional 3% of their *Higher Education Act of 1965* (Title II) funding to provide professional development and boost support for principals and other school leaders (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to Manna (2015), up to this point, “[States] have played a relatively small role in the professional development of their principals” (p. 35). In one of several personal interviews that Manna conducted with principals, one respondent called professional development for principals, the “most overlooked” area in education (p. 35). Manna asserted that “efforts to meet the professional development need of teachers and school leaders commonly treat the ‘and school leaders’ part as an afterthought rather than part of the initiative’s substantive core” (p. 20).

Traditionally, the focus in education has always been on teachers (Manna, 2015). Levine (2015) noted that throughout the years, discussions around educator effectiveness have especially focused on teachers and have largely ignored research on principals. To further this point, Manna (2015) noted that an analysis of the education newspaper *Education Week* revealed that in 1993, 2003, and 2013 they provided two-to-four times more coverage discussing teachers’ issues than principal issues. In 2014 alone, there were 317 teacher-related articles versus 97 principal-related articles published in Education



Week (Manna, p. 20). Thus, when it comes to professional development, teacher effectiveness has traditionally received the lion's share of the funding. For example, a study conducted by the Colorado Department of Education noted that of all Title II money spent across the state, only 0.8 percent went to support professional development for principals (Medler, Aldinger, Miller, Pearson, & Nazanin, 2011). Furthermore, the School Leaders Network (2014) noted that the issue is further exacerbated when principals do participate in professional development workshops and other meetings. The conversations usually center on a series of new initiatives, mandates, and programs that principals must execute, and very little, if any, of the discourse focuses on how to develop principals to effectuate these matters in their respective schools (School Leaders Network, 2014).

Sustained support and assistance is critical for school leaders and principals, especially for individuals who are new to their jobs (Goldrick 2016). Diann Woodward, president of the American Federation of School Administrators, noted that “the opportunity for states to allocate funding for principal-specific professional development will give school leaders more opportunities to succeed and improve our schools” (The Leader, 2016, p. 1). Yet, on this most important matter regarding professional development for school leaders, it is totally up to states to decide how to allocate their Title II funds, including whether to invest in professional development for principals (The Leader, 2016). As the School Leaders Network (2014) contended, neglecting to invest in the necessary professional development to build the capacity of principals will only serve to exacerbate the problem of principal turnover. As Manna (2015) noted, principals simply “churning from one school to another or out of the profession entirely

and will undermine the ability of states and districts to sustain improvements and high levels of excellence in their schools” (p. 38).

**The importance of principal leadership.** School leadership matters, as principals influence the direction of their schools in several ways. Principals are keenly involved in teacher recruitment and retention, teacher supervision, curriculum development, professional development for teachers, student discipline, and student and teacher scheduling (Coelli & Green, 2012). These individuals create a culture that retains the most effective teachers, which is pivotal to student and school success (NBPTS, 2010). As noted by Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010), exceptional school leadership makes a world of difference in schools and is second only to classroom instruction in promoting student learning. Several other researchers (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Burkhauser, 2015; Johnson, 2006; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins 2006; McIver, Kearns, Lyons, & Sussman, 2009) also have agreed that principals have a tremendous influence (direct and indirect) on (a) whether the working conditions at their schools are up to or above par and (b) teachers’ ability to deliver quality instruction and provide students with opportunities to maximize their learning experiences.

Moreover, to emphasize the importance of quality leadership and the effect it has on schools, particularly, schools that face more difficult circumstances (Leithwood et al., 2004), Louis et al. (2010) noted that “Leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is about establishing agreed-upon and worthwhile directions for the organization in question, and doing whatever it takes to prod and

support people to move in those directions” (pp. 9–10). According to Leithwood (2005), the hallmark of successful leadership is “doing right things right” (p. 3).

Grissom and Loeb (2011) noted that, to accomplish this end and achieve school improvement success, principals must maintain a balance between their instructional and managerial responsibilities. They also explained that principals could keep their schools running smoothly by “combining an understanding of the instructional needs of the school with an ability to target resources where they are needed, and hiring the best available teachers” (Grissom & Loeb, 2011, p.1119). This statement supported Branch et al.’s (2013) assertion that principal leadership has a significant effect on the quality of a school’s workforce. As Mitgang (2008) noted, more often than, the onus for attracting, hiring, and retaining excellent teachers and weeding out the mediocre ones, rests squarely on the shoulders of the school leader.

Furthermore, Branch et al. (2013) explained that managing teacher quality and retention is an important channel through which principals can influence the quality of their schools. Research supports the notion that teachers are more likely to stay in schools where the principals are deemed to be competent and effective leaders (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Boyd et al., 2011; Branch et al., 2013). Conversely, ineffective teachers are less likely to stay at schools run by highly effective principals (Branch et al., 2013). Clabo (2010) concluded that teachers “respected the importance of their principals’ role in hiring effective teachers and matching these teachers with the most appropriate classes and students” and “recognized the difficulty and necessity in removing ineffective teachers from the schools before they gained tenure” (p. 226).

Boyd and his colleagues (2011) found that support from the principal was one of the most influential factors linked to teacher satisfaction and teacher tenure. They concluded that the more satisfied teachers were with the principal, the more likely they were to stay at the school (Boyd et al., 2011). On the other hand, dissatisfaction with the principal meant that teachers were less likely to stay at the school, a conclusion that supported the notion that having an effective principal is a key factor in efforts to improve teacher and school quality (Boyd et al., 2011).

Providing the necessary support for a veteran teacher or a first-year teacher is an essential and necessary ingredient in successful schools (Boyd et al, 2011). In a 2013 report title, *What Research Says About the Importance of Principal Leadership: Leadership Matters*, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) highlighted the impact of leadership and the effect principals can have on teachers who were new to the profession. The report indicated that new teachers felt their transition into the teaching profession was much smoother when they viewed their principal as competent and effective. They also gave their principals high marks if they believed the school leaders were approachable, supportive, and solution-oriented (NASSP, 2013).

Several other researchers have found that supportive and effective principal leadership behaviors can affect teachers' attitudes about their work environments (Hirsch, Frietas, Church, & Villar, 2009; Hirsch, Sioberg, & Germuth, 2010; Ladd, 2009; Scholastic & Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). For example, the Center for Comprehensive School Reform (2007) and Ladd (2009), concluded that an individual's work environment whether positive or negative, emerged as a salient factor in

determining teachers' intentions to leave or to remain at their schools. Similarly, Hirsh et al., (2009) noted that teachers in Massachusetts were more likely to remain at their current school if they agreed with positive statements that made about the leadership at the school. According to Ladd (2009), "School leadership emerged as the most salient measure of working conditions" (p. 29). Equally as important, Hirsch et al. (2010) found that teachers in Maryland underscored the significance that leadership at all levels had on their decision remain in or leave their schools. The researchers noted the following:

School leadership is the most important condition affecting teachers' willingness to remain at their school. Teachers who indicated that they plan to remain teaching in their schools were twice as likely to agree they work in a trusting and supportive environment. (Hirsch et al., 2010, p. vii)

A comprehensive review of the relevant existent literature revealed significant evidence that effective principal leadership is one, if not the most significant, factor that influences teacher retention and student achievement results in schools (Beteille et al., 2012; Branch et al., 2013; Miller, 2009). According to researchers, teachers often make the decision to remain in or leave a school based on the working conditions at the school; the amount, frequency, and quality of the support they receive; and the degree to which the principals fosters a positive growth-oriented culture throughout the school (Boyd et al., 2011; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Johnson, 2006; McIver et al., 2009; Mitgang, 2008). Additionally, as Wahlstrom, Loui, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) explained, "Leadership effects on student learning occur largely because leadership strengthens professional community; teachers' engagement in professional community, in turn, fosters the use of instructional practices that are associated with student achievement" (p.

10). Most importantly, “Principals who are strong, effective, responsive leaders help inspire and enhance the abilities of their teachers and other school staff to excellent work” (Manna, 2015, p. 7). Thus, having competent leaders to hire, support, and retain good teachers is paramount to having successful schools or revitalizing a failing school (Branch, et al., 2013.)

**The impact of principal turnover on schools.** While principal attrition and turnover may be unavoidable in many school districts across the nation, often, it is usually the rapid and sometimes consistent turnover rate that presents considerable challenges to these districts and their schools (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Further, steady and effective leadership allows schools to maintain their focus on initiatives and programs that are impactful and support positive school results (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Consistent principal turnover can lead to an increase in staff cynicism, a diminished sense of purpose, and has led to a collective lack of focus on meaningful school improvement efforts (Fink, 2006).

In a mixed methods study, Mascall and Leithwood (2010) surveyed 2500 teachers for 80 schools and conducted 40 school site visits to determine if principal turnover significantly affected student achievement or school and classroom conditions. The research also examined three years of student achievement data from each respective school. Their results indicated that principal turnover had a significant negative effect on student achievement. School-level conditions had more of a mitigating effect on the results than individual classroom conditions, suggesting that individual classroom practices may somehow be shielded from the direct impact of frequent principal turnover (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010).

According to the NASSP (2007), the challenges that middle school principals face differ from those experienced by elementary and high school leaders. Middle school is unique merely because of the challenges presented by the incomparable nature of middle grade students (Anfara et al., 2006) and the demands that their developmental needs place on teachers and principals (Gale & Bishop, 2014). The enigmatic nature of the middle grade student—self-assured and spirited one minute and physically lethargic and childish the next (Brighton, 2007)—suggests that they often walk a thin line between independence and the need for adult reassurance (Powell, 2011). The fact that middle school plays a vital role in students’ future success—particularly at such a vulnerable period in their lives when many of them may suffer from depression, low self-esteem, or a declined interest in school (Balfanz, et al., 2007)—makes it more important for school administrators and educators to have a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and learning constructs that characterize the needs of middle school students (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010). As Gale and Bishop (2014) noted, such knowledge will “help promote positive youth development during this most impressionable period” (p. 2).

Further, a report published by the Carnegie Corporation, titled *Turning Points 2000*, asserted that middle school leadership played a critical role in students’ present and future academic success (Jackson & Davis, 2000). The researchers noted, “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). In South Carolina, a report published by the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, titled *Caught Between the Lines* (2006), noted that the tenure of the

principals serving in the state's 274 middle schools decreased as the schools' poverty indexes increased. The 56 middle schools that reported a poverty index below 50% had an average principal tenure of 5.4 years. The 81 middle schools with a poverty index between 51% and 79% had an average principal tenure of 4.5 years. Finally, the 81 middle schools with a poverty index of 80% or higher had an average principal tenure of 3.7 years. Thus, the report shows a higher the poverty index reduces the principal's tenure in middle schools (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2006).

Weinstein et al. (2009) also explored the impact of principal turnover in schools. In a study of newly-built high schools in New York City, Weinstein and his colleagues examined 80 schools and found that nearly half of the sites had experienced at least two principal changes in their first ten years of existence. Weinstein et al. concluded that these principal changes led to a decrease in student performance and graduation rates. Similarly, Miller (2009) used student achievement and teacher retention data from 1994 to 2006 to examine the effect of principal turnover in the state. The study revealed that over half of the principals in the state left their schools within the first four years. Thus, teacher turnover rates significantly increased and students test scores declined. Miller noted that student test scores were lower during the new principal's first two years than they were during the tenure of the previous principal. Data has shown that principals need to be in their respective schools five to seven years to establish trust, build positive relationships, spur teacher retention, and improve student performance (Fuller & Young, 2009; Hanselman et al., 2011; Vanderhaar et al., 2006).

In an exploration of student success in middle schools, McDonald (2014) conducted a quantitative inquiry that examined the relationship between middle school



principal longevity and student achievement in South Carolina. McDonald found that middle school principal longevity positively affected student achievement. The data showed that in schools with longer tenured principal, more students scored proficient or higher on the state assessments in math and reading. The data yielded the same results when the researcher accounted for school enrollment and poverty indexes (McDonald, 2014).

As mentioned previously, principal turnover can also have negative effects on school culture. According to Hanselman et al. (2011), frequent principal departures can erode trust, shared norms, support, and other social structures within a school. Meyer and Macmillian (2011) noted similar results in their study regarding the effects of frequent principal turnover on 12 schools in Nova Scotia, Canada. The results from an examination of data collected from teacher surveys and interviews completed in the first three years after a principal change revealed that such turnover impacted teacher trust, morale, and efficacy in these schools (Meyer & Macmillian, 2011).

Researchers have also found that principal turnover can have an impact on a much broader scale. Holme and Rangle (2012), for example, linked principal and teacher turnover to school system instability in a qualitative study of five large school systems in Texas. Conversely, the researchers noted that consistent and long lasting working relationships between principals and teachers led to the development of greater social capital; which, in turn, led to better collaboration, support for organizational learning, the transfer of knowledge, organizational stability, and improved school performance. This finding supports the claim (Branch, et al., 2013; Miller, 2013, Leithwood, 2004; Seashore-Loius, 2010) that consistent and effective principal leadership matters.

**Reasons for principal attrition, mobility, and turnover.** Principal retention has become a very challenging issue for policy makers and school districts both in the United States and internationally (Browne-Ferrigno & Johnson-Fusarelli, 2005; Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009; Partlow & Ridenour, 2008; Stoelinga et al., 2008; Walker & Qain, 2006; Whittal, 2002). The turnover rates for first year principals is alarmingly high. In 2012 the Rand Corporation published a report showing that over 22% of the 519 first-year principals in school districts during the 2007–2008 school years left their posts within two years. The report also noted that new principals who were placed in schools that failed to meet their AYP targets were more likely to depart (Burkhauser et al., 2012). Even more disturbing, those that depart often leave the principalship entirely (Viadero, 2009, p. 1). One researcher stated, “I talk to a lot of principals, and it’s becoming more and more rare that you’ll have a principal stay at a school for 15 or 20 years...Now, you stay three to five years, and you either move to another school or go to the central office. I think it is a problem” (Viadero, 2009, p. 1).

Recently, the *Washington Post* (2015) reported that one in four of the 111 schools in the D.C. Public Schools System (DCPS) started the 2015-2016 school year with a new principal. The *Post* also reported that during the previous school year, the district appointed 21 new principals. Additionally, studies from Illinois (DeAngelis & White, 2011), Missouri (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010), New York (Clark et al., 2009), Texas (Fuller & Young, 2009), Ohio (Partlow & Ridenour, 2008), North Carolina (Gates et al., 2006), Kentucky (Browne-Ferrigno & Johnson-Fusarelli, 2005), and Colorado (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004) have examined the retention and movement of principals and all have revealed the growing challenges these states are facing related to principal turnover in

their respective geographical locations. Internationally, studies from Australia (Thomson & Blackmore, 2006), China (Walker & Qian, 2006), Canada (Weiss, 2005), and New Zealand (Whittal, 2002) all raised concern about the trend of high principal turnover, especially at the secondary level, where the rate of principal movement is greater than at the primary level.

There are myriad factors have led to principal mobility, and ultimately, their departure from the principalship. Increased pressure arising from higher standards and accountability, the evolving complexities and time requirements of the job, stress, retirement, increased instructional responsibilities, budget cuts, lack of parental support, changes in student demographics, and the frustration spurred by politics and bureaucratic red tape are all reasons that have been noted for principal turnover. (Battle & Gruber, 2010; Beteille, et al. 2012; Cushing, 2003; Goldring & Taie, Metlife, 2013; NCSL, 2002).

*Accountability factors.* Over the past 14 years, several policies have had a direct and/or indirect impact on school districts' ability to retain highly-qualified and effective principals. Increased accountability measures may prove to be productive in improving the standard of education; however, current state and federal mandates all place extreme pressures on campus principals to implement school reforms that will increase student achievement outcomes, as measured by state standardized tests, and close the achievement gap while maintaining the school vision (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Foster, 2005; Rutherford, 2005; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). One set of policies that has had a significant impact on principal turnover in the United States is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Ahn & Vigdor, 2014).

As stated previously, under NCLB, states held all public schools receiving federal funding accountable for meeting their state mandated AYP targets in math and reading each year and achieve mastery by the end of the 2013-14 school year. By 2014, 100% of the student in US public schools were expected to be at proficient levels in reading and math based on the standardized test results in each state. NCLB also mandated that the principals of schools deemed to be failing in achieving AYP should be replaced as part of the district's commitment to turning around these schools. According Ahn and Vigdor (2014) this mandate failed to consider the variety of factors (e.g., lack of highly qualified teacher in the neediest schools, lack of parental involvement, the number of special needs student, etc.) that could influence schools' ability to meet their state AYP targets. Thus, many principals felt overburdened by the responsibilities that high stakes testing placed on their shoulders, in addition to their already complex workload (Anh & Vigdor, 2014).

Akiba and Reichardt (2004) and Partlow (2007) found that student test scores in math and reading on state assessments were significant factors in predicting principal attrition and turnover rates in Colorado and Ohio. Despite the Obama administration's efforts to enact new programs and legislation [e.g., RttT (2009) and ESSA (2015)] to supplant the flawed NCLB mandates and provide relief from the one-size fit all accountability standards that were its hallmark, the damage may have already been done. According to Li (2012), "NCLB decreased average principal quality, particularly in schools that served disadvantaged students by inducing more abled principals to move to schools less likely to face NCLB sanctions" (p. 1).

***Time requirements and the complexity of the job.*** The principal's job is especially challenging, complex, and demanding. A study by Public Agenda (2001)

quoted one principal as saying that “the job is ‘almost overwhelming,’ my desk is never clear of obligations... constant interruptions by parents, teachers...principals do not have a lunch hour” (p. 5). Principals across all levels agree that the job of principal is no longer “doable” (Dipaolo & Tschannen-Moran, 2003) has become too big and complex and requires significantly more time than before (Metlife, 2013). Today’s principals must be their school’s instructional leader, building and business manager, chief fiduciary agent, motivator, psychologist, public relations expert, curriculum developer, and disciplinarian (Lynch, 2012). The recently-issued Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL, formerly ISLLC) validate this claim (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015). The PSELs state that principals and school leaders must be skilled in ten interdependent domains to support student learning and help schools achieve more equitable outcomes:

- Mission, Vision, and Core Values
- Ethics and Professional Norms
- Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
- Community of Care and Support for Students
- Professional Capacity of School Personnel
- Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
- Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
- Operations and Management, and
- School Improvement (p. 3).

According to NPBEA, the standards were “designed to ensure that educational leaders are ready to meet effectively the challenges and opportunities of the job today and in the future as education, schools and society continue to transform” (p. 1). However, the PSELs, well-intentioned as they may be, seem to add another layer of complexity to an already-complicated job. As a MetLife study found in 2013, 75% of principals say the complexity and added responsibilities of the principalship makes it unfamiliar to the job they knew five years ago.

With these added responsibilities (written and unwritten) the amount of time principals now spend on the job has increased substantially, particularly at the secondary school level. According to Magnuson (2000), middle and high school principals spent approximately of 60-70 hours a week at work, while their elementary school counterparts only worked for approximately 50-60 hours per week. Long work hours spent on summer planning, attending meetings, and supervising after school and weekend extracurricular activities translate to less time at home with family and friends (Magnuson, 2000). Moreover, in 2014, results published in the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey indicated that more than 50% of Australian principals at all levels worked 56 or more hours and 13% worked 66 or more hours per week during the school year. Fifty-five percent of the principals polled also reported working 25 or more hours during school holidays (Riley, 2014).

Cushing, Kerrins, and Johnstone (2003) noted that for principals, “the issue is not only that the days are longer or that work is required on weekends, but the school year is significantly longer, too, and that takes a toll on principals' personal lives” (p. 29). In his study of 50 principals from rural schools in New Zealand, Whittall (2002) found that

increased performance expectations, the number of work hours, and job-related stress were all factors that contributed to principal dissatisfaction, burnout, and, ultimately, turnover. The overwhelming demands of the principalship may also dissuade other highly-qualified individuals from applying for such jobs.

***Job stress.*** An increase in stress levels could certainly be a direct result of an increased amount of time spent on the job. DiPaolo and Tschannen-Moran (2003) reported that 91% and 86% of principals cited stress and time demands of the job as the leading factors for leaving the principalship. MetLife (2013) reported that 90% of the principals surveyed agreed that principals should accept full responsibility for the leadership of their schools. However, nearly half of the respondents reported that the complex nature of the job exerts great stress on them each week. Over 50% of the principals in secondary schools and schools where students were not performing on grade level in math and reading reported being under great stress several days a week (MetLife, 2013). Cushing et al. (2003) noted the following:

Job stress also comes from high levels of responsibility while authority and flexibility are simultaneously reduced via union contracts and fiscal and legal requirements. It comes from being the first head to roll if reform demands and targets aren't met; and from perceiving the job as, for the most part, thankless. (p. 29)

Unfortunately, health concerns such as hypertension and weight gain are related to the elevated stress levels principals experience on the job (Cushing, 2003). According to Riley (2014), 49% of the principals in the Australian wellness survey reported that they were taking prescription medication for a diagnosed health condition. Moreover, the

Riley found that principals experienced greater levels of emotional demand, symptoms of stress, and burnout than did the general population. The study also showed that the greatest stressor for principals in every sector was the enormous workload, followed closely by a lack of time to focus on instruction (Riley, 2014). Cushing et al. (2003) directly attributed these concerns to the fast pace and the high demand of the principalship (Cushing et al., 2003). The mountains of paperwork created as a direct result of district and state demands, the blame for not meeting student achievement targets, and the perpetual motion of the school reform movement are all additional stressors that have given principals pause for concern (Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). Thus, the job-related stress factors facilitated by increasing demands of the principalship have given many principals reasons to believe that the job may not be one worth having (Hertling, 2001).

***Changes in student demographics.*** The racial, socioeconomic, and academic fabric and makeup of student populations across the nation make it next to impossible to draw comparisons amongst schools. Every school has its own unique set of characteristics and challenges; therefore, principals must equip themselves with a new array of skills and knowledge that will lead to success for all members of their increasingly diverse student bodies (Loeser, 2008).

Several researchers have found that school-level characteristics like the racial makeup of the student population, the percentage of students receiving free and reduced meals (FARMS), and the socioeconomic background of the students have had some effect on the instability of the principalship (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Baker et al., 2010; Beteille et al., 2012; Branch et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2009; Clotfelter et al., 2006;



DeAngelis & White, 2011; Fuller & Young, 2009; Gates et al., 2006; Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010; Papa, 2007; Ringel et al., 2004). While each study differs in its breath and scope, they all clearly present data showing that student demographics is one of many factors that plays a role in principals stated reasons for leaving their schools or districts. The data indicated that while some principals adapted and rose to the challenge presented by perpetual changes in student demographics, others opted to transfer to schools with more monolithic populations in affluent districts (Baker et al., 2010; Beteille et al., 2012; DeAngelis & White, 2011; Gates et al., 2006).

Gates et al. (2006), for example, noted that the racial makeup of the student body in North Carolina and Illinois schools was a significant factor in predicting whether principals remained in or changed schools. The researchers found that principals in both states who led schools with significantly higher percentages of minority students were more likely to change schools or positions. According to the data, North Carolina schools with no minority students had a 14%, while schools with 100% minority student populations had a 24% turnover rate. In Illinois, while the rate was not as high as that in North Carolina (13% in schools with no minority students and 16% in schools with 100% minority student populations) the data still indicated that the percentage of minority students in a school was a significant predictor of principal mobility (Gates et al., 2006).

Beteille and her colleagues (2012) used data from Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) administrative files to study the movements of 360 principals from 2003-2009. Their findings showed that principal mobility rates were the greatest in schools attended by a large population of minority, low achieving poor students. The data showed that schools ranked in the top tier (based on the number of students receiving free

and reduced meals [FARMS]) had a 26% annual turnover rate, while schools in the lower tier, with more affluent student populations, only experienced a 17% annual turnover rate. The data painted an even worse picture for schools with an inordinate number of low achieving students. The annual principal turnover rate in these schools was almost 30%. Conversely, only 15% of principals in schools with significantly lower numbers of low performing students left their school each year (Beteille et al., 2012).

Loeb et al. (2010) also reported that principals were less likely to leave schools with “favorable” working conditions and fewer minority, poor, and academically at-risk students. The researchers also found that the schools with high proportions of minority and poor students were often staffed with new principals in the first year of their tenure (Loeb et al., 2010).

As noted earlier, DeAngelis and White (2011) examined a large dataset of over 7000 individuals who served at least one year as the principal of an Illinois public school. One of their significant findings was that principals serving in schools with a higher percentage of minority students and lower household incomes left their schools at a higher rate than did their counterparts serving in schools with a lower percentage of minority students and higher household incomes (DeAngelis & White, 2011). The attrition and mobility rate between the two was 10.9% and 7.7%, respectively.

Existing research clearly shows that schools that serve the children with the greatest need experienced the highest rates of principal attrition (Fuller & Young, 2010; Papa, 2004). These findings support previous research conducted in Missouri, New York, and Texas (Baker et al., 2010; Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007; Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002). In all, the resounding theme evident in

the research is that principals working in schools with high concentrations of minority, poor, and academically challenged students often opt to transfer to schools that with more “favorable working conditions” or simply leave the principalship all together. Notably, these studies usually concluded with the researchers espousing their perceptions about the nature of principal attrition and in large part, ignoring the lived experiences and perceptions of principals themselves (Boyce & Bowers, 2015).

**The effect of age, gender, race and salary on principal turnover.** Researchers have found that, in addition to school demographics, factors like salary, individual principal characteristics (e.g., age, race, and gender) and school level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) have influenced principal attrition and mobility. Akiba and Reichardt (2004), for example, studied elementary school principals in Colorado from 1999 to 2001 and concluded that age, gender, and race played a notable role in elementary principal turnover and attrition. The collected data showed that minority principals under the age of 35 and over the age of 55 had a higher turnover rate (40% and 35%, respectively) than did their non-minority counterparts in the same age categories (20% and 18%, respectively). The researchers also noted that female principals had a higher attrition rate (30%) than did their male counterparts (23%). Similarly, Gates et al. (2006) found that female principals in Illinois were 3% more likely to leave the system or change positions than were their male colleagues. Conversely, Fuller and Young (2010) discovered that personal characteristics like age, gender, and race had only a minor impact on the retention rates of newly hired principals in Texas (p. 3).

A few researchers have also identified salary as one of the drivers of principal turnover. Incentivizing principals to remain in challenging schools through salary

differentials is by no means a novel idea (Baker, et al., 2010; Papa, 2007; Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011). In their research on the job desirability of high school principals, Pounder and Merrill (2001) noted that, coupled with other factors like the demands of the job, salary was the most important driver of a principal's decision to remain in the principalship. Similarly, in a study of New York state principals, Papa (2007), found that the likelihood of principal retention increased by over 8% when the school district used a \$1000 salary increase as an incentive to spur retention. Data revealed a slightly higher result (11.9% retention) when principals received a \$1000 increase in salary for leading schools with a higher number of non-White, limited English proficient (LEP) students, and non-highly qualified (NHQ) teachers (Papa, 2007).

Baker et al. (2010) later found similar results when studying the factors that influenced leadership stability behaviors among Missouri principals from 1999 to 2006. Baker and his colleagues noted that compensation was a major incentive for principals to remain in their schools. They also found that principal stability was more prevalent in schools with high concentrations of Black students, because these principals were usually paid more than were their colleagues, as schools with high proportions of minority, poor, and low-achieving students had a greater chance of losing their principals each year. Papa (2007) noted that "creating policy initiatives that are focused on providing financial incentive for quality principals to remain highly challenging schools could level the playing field and eliminate disparities between schools and possibly lead to higher principal retention at those schools" (p. 287).

In their exploration of what they called "the emotional aspects of job satisfaction and work," Tekleselassie and Villarreal (2011) used multilevel modeling to analyze data

from the *2003–2004 Schools and Staffing Survey* (p. 257). They sought to determine whether individual and or school-level variables had a predictive effect on a principal's decisions to transfer to another principal position (mover intentions) or to leave the principalship altogether (leaver intentions). Key finding from the Tekleselassie and Villarreal study included the following:

- A principal's ethnicity was a significant factor in leavers' intentions but not in movers' intentions. All minority principals (non-White) were less likely to leave than White principals.
- Generally, as principals' age an increased, their mobility and departure intentions decreased. This finding was similar to that noted by Gates et al. (2006).
- Female principals were less likely than were men to leave or move, contrary to results from Illinois reported by Gates et al., (2006).
- Principals with doctoral degrees were 1.56 times more likely to change schools than were principals with master's degrees.
- Salary was strongly related to principal departure and mobility intentions. For a \$10,000 increase in salary, principals were likely to move or leave by factors of 0.87 and 0.88, respectively (pp. 270-275).

Contrary to previous studies (Cushing et al., 2003; Magnuson, 2000; Public Agenda, 2001; Riley, 2014; Whittal, 2002), the number of hours that principals spent on work-related activities had no significant effect on a principal's departure intentions, but was a factor in whether principals chose to move (Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011). Finally, regarding the emotional aspects of work (job satisfaction), Tekleselassie and

Villarreal found that principals were less likely to move to another school or leave the profession if they (a) believed that their job was a worthy one or (b) were satisfied with the district, and enthusiastic about being a principal. In other word, high levels of satisfaction decreased the likelihood that a principal would move to another school or leave the principalship altogether. Boyce and Bowers (2015) noted, “[The] lived experiences of principals are relevant in distinguishing between different types of turnover intentions” (p. 4). This point can certainly be instructive in determining why principals may choose to leave or stay in their positions.

**Natural principal attrition, retirement, and other employment opportunities.**

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century researchers believed that one could trace principal turnover directly to the retirement of the baby boomer generation (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004). In their 2011 study of Illinois Public school principals, DeAngelis and White (2011) noted between 2003 to 2007, 65% of the individuals who left the principalship cited retirement as their reason for departure. Of those retirees, 72% were 55 years of age or older (DeAngelis & White, 2011). Moreover, in their national study of principal attrition, Goldring & Taie (2014) noted that 38% of public school and 30-percent of private school principals left their posts due to retirement.

Data show, however, that principals also choose to leave the principalship to pursue other employment opportunities (a) in the same school district, (b) in a different school district, (c) or in a completely different field (DeAngelis & White, 2011; Goldring & Taie, 2014). Goldring and Taie (2014) noted that 54% of the public-school principals who left their positions took a similar position in the same district; however, the

researchers were unable to account for 5% of the principals who left their schools, because their former school districts were unable to report their new employment status.

A wealth of data exists to support the notion that principal attrition, in large part, is the result of school leaders' decisions to move to other schools (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; DeAngelis & White, 2010; Gates et al., 2006, Goldring & Taie, 2014; Loeb et al., 2010; Ringel et al., 2004); and they typically make this decision because of student demographics (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Baker et al., 2010; DeAngelis & White, 2010, Gates et al., 2006, Loeb et al., 2010; Papa, 2007). Many principals also receive promotions to serve in other capacities in their district. For example, in 2011 as a major part of its reorganization effort, the NDPSD created 12 instructional director positions, and the district filled ten of these newly created positions with sitting principals. An additional 14 principals left their posts that year to fill other central office positions (NDPSD, 2014). While these departures certainly contributed to principal attrition in the district, it adds to the notion that all principal attrition is not bad.

Unfortunately, very little data exist that show what other employment opportunities principals seek when they choose to leave the principalship altogether. DeAngelis and White (2010) expressed same concerns about the lack of national data detailing where principals go after the leave the principalship. These researchers also acknowledged that “Young principals were substantially more likely than older principals to cite a move to an education position in a non-public or out- of-state school, domestic/child care responsibilities, or involuntary removal from their position as their reasons for leaving” (DeAngelis & White, 2010, p. 2).

**Factors associated with principal retention.** An extensive review of current literature on principal retention has revealed that the number of studies exploring the reasons that principals leave their positions far exceeds the inquiries related to why certain individuals choose to stay. Despite this disparity, some pertinent research does exist that examines the various factors that encourage principal retention and the motives that lead individuals to pursue the principalship. While researchers have not conducted extensive examinations of motivational factors related to principal retention on a national level (Bass, 2006), there is some data available on the factors that contribute to principals' job satisfaction. Ostensibly, one can infer that if people are overwhelmingly satisfied with the working conditions at their jobs, there is an increased likelihood that these individuals will choose to voluntarily remain in their positions.

**Job satisfaction.** "Job satisfaction is of great importance to improve the productivity level of the employees" (Torkabadi & Kheirkhah, 2013, p. 1). Recognizing why individuals are satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs and work in general is a key aspect to understanding why school principals may choose to stay in the principalship for lengthy periods of time. Why are people motivated to work and develop the desire to become better at that work? While different definitions of job satisfaction exist throughout the literature, three notable definitions are apropos for this research study. Spector (1997) defined job satisfaction as "simply how people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their jobs; it is the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs (p. 2). Business dictionary (2016) defines it as the contentment (or lack of it) arising from an interplay of an employee's positive and negative feelings toward his or her work. However, according to Redmond (2016), the most noted and used



definitions of job satisfaction is the one proposed by Locke (1976). Locke defined job satisfaction as the “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (p. 1304). Further, peoples’ attitudes, perceptions, and opinions have all been important factors that have helped to shape the definition and idea of job satisfaction (Kindt, 2008). Thus, “job satisfaction becomes a central attention in the researches and discussions in work and organizational psychology because it is believed to have relationship with the job performance” (Redmond, 2016, p. 1).

Several theories have been developed in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that has tried to explain the influence of job satisfaction on employee retention and/or departure intentions and to gain a better understanding for what motivates people to work (Redmond, 2016). Theorists such as Abraham Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, Frederick Herzberg’s (1968) Two-Factor (Motivator-Hygiene) Theory, J. Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham’s (1976) Job Characteristics Model, Edwin Locke’s (1976) Range of Affect Theory, Albert Bandura’s (1977) Social Learning Theory, and Timothy Judge’s (1998) Dispositional Theory have all made significant contributions the literature about the different factors related to job satisfaction (Redmond, 2016). Herzberg’s (1968), Two-Factor Theory and Locke’s (1977) Range of Affect Theory are two of the most significant classical theories that have served as the foundation for multiple educational studies through the years.

**Herzberg’s two-factor theory (motivator-hygiene theory).** Herzberg, Mausner, Snyderman (1959) were among the first researchers to study factors that motivate and make people happy in the work place. This ground breaking research subsequently lead to the creation of the Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory of job satisfaction.

Herzberg studied the attitudes of 200 men while they performed their jobs and noted two categories of factors that led to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their work environment. Herzberg called them motivation and hygiene factors. Motivating factors are intrinsic and drive individuals to want to perform while hygiene factors are extrinsic and are representative of working conditions (Porter, Wrench & Hoskinson, 2007). Table 3 presents the top six factors that cause job satisfaction (motivation factors) and dissatisfaction (hygiene factors). Herzberg (1968) noted that the two factors are not simply opposites of each other but are in fact different. In other words, “the opposite of satisfaction is not dissatisfaction, but no satisfaction. Likewise, the opposite of dissatisfaction is not satisfaction, but no dissatisfaction” (Herzberg, 1968, p. 91).

Table 3

*Factors Affecting Job Attitudes*

Motivation factors leading to job satisfaction	Hygiene factors leading to job dissatisfaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company Policy and procedures</li> <li>• Supervision</li> <li>• Relationship with Boss</li> <li>• Working Conditions</li> <li>• Relationship with peers</li> <li>• Salary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement</li> <li>• Recognition</li> <li>• The work itself</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Advancement</li> <li>• Growth</li> </ul>

*Adapted from NetMBA.Com*

**Locke’s range of affect theory.** Mueller and Kim (2008), describe two types of job satisfaction that indicate how individuals may feel about their jobs. Global job satisfaction refers to a person’s overall feelings about his or her job (i.e., "Overall, I love my job."). On the other hand, job facet satisfaction describes a person’s feelings regarding certain aspects of their job, such their schedule, compensation, growth

opportunities, working conditions, and their relationships with supervisors and co-workers (e.g., "Overall, I love my job, but my schedule is difficult to manage.") (Mueller & Kim, 2008).

Job facet satisfaction was first proposed by Locke in 1976. According to Locke, the perception of work facets, while important, differ among individuals. He explained the effects of these differences in his Range of Affect Theory (1976). Locke surmised that employees weigh facets of their jobs differently while appraising job satisfaction. According to Locke, the difference between what a person wants from a job and what a person is getting from a job determines that person's level of job satisfaction (Locke, 1976). For instances, autonomy may be very important for one employee, while another employee may glean greater satisfaction from having positive interpersonal relationships at work. Consequently, this becomes an employee's gauge of satisfaction or dissatisfaction when their expectations are met or not, and may be determining factors in whether the leave or remain in a job (Locke, 1976). Further, placing too much value on the absence of a precise job facet could increase feelings of dissatisfaction (Locke, 1976). Hence, to increase job satisfaction and promote employee retention, it is important for supervisors and managers to be able to identify the facets that are important to their employees and make sure these facets are met appropriately (Ray & Ranjan 2011).

Recently, Oxford Economics (2014) with support from System analyses and Program networking (SAP SE) conducted a pair of global surveys in 27 different countries. One survey was comprised of more than 2700 business executives and the other of 2700 employees. The surveys revealed that compensation was the number one thing that matters to employees. Similarly, a 2013 survey conducted the Society for

Human Resource Management (SHRM) also found that salary and other compensation benefits was the number one factor that contributed to job satisfaction. However, the SHRM November 2014 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement Survey produced different results. This survey of 600 employees in the US assessed 43 aspects of employee job satisfaction and 37 aspects of employee engagement in eight different areas that ranged from career development to engagement behaviors. The findings showed that 72% of employees in 2014 rated respectful treatment of all employees at all levels as the number one contributor to job satisfaction. Sixty-four percent reported trust between employees and senior management as the number two reason that increased their job satisfaction (Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement, 2015). It is also important to note that 2014 was the first year that the top two aspects have been included in the survey. As reported by SHRM (2015), “because both components encourage stronger rapport between employees and upper management, it is not surprising that these factors were rated highly as organizations transitioned out of a period of uncertainty” (p. 7).

In one of the most comprehensive job satisfaction surveys done to date, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) (2014) surveyed over 203,000 people from 189 countries around the world. The survey was translated in 44 different languages. The largest number of respondents were from Brazil, Germany, Mexico, and the United State, each well over 11,000 respondents. In all there were 46 countries with over 1000 respondents and 70 countries with 100 or more respondents. Based on the data presented by BCG, the number one factor that contributes to happiness on the job is getting appreciated for the work one does. A 37-year-old interpreter from Russia noted “when people feel appreciated, their job satisfaction skyrockets” (BCG, 2014, p. 15). Good

relationships in the workplace with colleagues and superiors, a good work-life balance, and the company's financial stability were also ranked in the top five of that promote happiness on the job (BCG, 2015). Unlike the findings from previous surveys, employees ranked salary as the eighth highest factor that contributed to job satisfaction (BCG, 2014). Furthermore, BCG (2014) noted workers are placing more emphasis "softer" and intrinsic rewards and less on salary. Moreover, Morgan (2014) observed a similar disposition regarding employee job satisfaction in organizations he has spoken with. Morgan concluded that "you can't pay someone lot of money, treat them poorly, and expect them to do their jobs well just because they get a nice paycheck" (p. 3).

**Principals and job satisfaction.** Over the years many researchers have studied job satisfaction among school principals (Chang, Leach & Anderman, 2015); DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003); Federici and Skaalvik, 2012; Fraser & Brock, 2006 Friedman, Friedman, & Markow, 2008; Maforah & Shulze, 2012; Pijanowski & Brady, 2009; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Scott & Dinham, 2003; Stark-Price, Munoz, Winter, & Petrosko, 2006; Sodoma & Else, 2009; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002;). The purpose, finding, and the implications from many of those studies is discussed below.

Chang, Leach, and Anderman (2015) collected data from online surveys of 1500 elementary, middle and high school principals from different school districts across the United States to examined the relationship between principals perceived autonomy support from superintendents, the principals' commitment to their schools, and job satisfaction. An analysis of the data showed that principals were more satisfied with their jobs and emotionally attached to their respective school districts when they perceived that their superintendents were more supportive of principal autonomy (Chang, et al, 2015).

Principals with a longer tenure in their school districts had a greater emotional attachment to their schools and the school district and felt they had more autonomy than those who were relatively new to their districts (Chang, et al., 2015). This an important factor to consider when addressing the issue of retention for all principals, in particularly those who are new to the profession, since affective commitment is strongly correlated to superintendent autonomy support. (Chang, et al., 2015). This study suggests the superintendents work to develop positive relationships with their principals to ensure that the principals perceive them as encouraging, understanding, and supportive their decision-making abilities (Chang, et al., 2015). Such support for can improve principal-teacher relations and ultimately facilitate better student achievement outcomes (Chang, et al., 2015).

In a research study that consisted of interviews with 48 principals and assistant principals, Farley-Ripple, Raffel, and Welch (2012) found evidence that suggests multiple behavioral, environmental and personal factors contribute school administrators' job satisfaction or dissatisfaction and thus significantly influences their career decision-making. The authors noted that a range of factors working as systems of “pushes and pulls” drove administrators to either leave or remain in a school:

“As such, we found that these forces can serve as pushes (forces internal to the situation that encourage the administrator to move out) or pulls (forces outside of the position, perhaps in their personal life or in the larger system, which draw administrators away from their position)” (Farley-Ripple, et al., p. 801).

Pull factors such as personal growth and recognition could lead to retention. Conversely, push factors such as poor compensation or working conditions, could instead lead to turnover (Fields, 2008).

Federici and Skaalvik (2012), studied principal self-efficacy (“an individual’s belief about what he or she can achieve in each context” p. 297) in relation to job satisfaction burnout, and the motivation to quit in 2900 public and private elementary and middle school Norwegian principals. The researchers used electronic questionnaires as their primary means of data collection. The findings showed a strong positive correlation between principal self-efficacy and job satisfaction. There was also a strong indirect correlation between principal self-efficacy and job satisfaction when job satisfaction was used to predict burnout and vice versa (Federici and Skaalvik, 2012). Moreover, Federici and Skaalvik noted that self-efficacy, because of the demanding and unpredictable of the principalship, may contribute positively to the performance of principals. This suggests that increasing self-efficacy of the individual principals should be a priority for those charged with developing, supporting, and improving leadership in schools (Federici and Skaalvik, 2012).

Developing and maintaining positive relationships appears to be another salient factor that plays a prominent role in an individual’s decision to pursue or remain in the principalship. Maforah and Shulze (2012) examined the job satisfaction of 30 principals in the West Province of South Africa. They used interviews and qualitative questionnaires to identify several motivational factors that contributed to the principals’ level of job satisfaction. Salary, parental involvement, interpersonal relationships, and the commitment of colleagues to their jobs were the most frequent motivators associated with

the job satisfaction of the respondents (Maforah & Shulze, 2012). DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) found that Virginia principals felt the most satisfying facet of the principalship was the rapport (85% satisfaction rating) they had developed with their students.

Malone, Sharp, and Walter (2001) reported similar findings in their study of elementary, middle, and high school principals in Indiana. The researchers asked 125 participants to rate their job satisfaction by responding to various questions and statements in a survey. They utilized a Likert scale (1-5) to determine the degree of satisfaction principals felt about their jobs (5 being a very strong reason for liking the job). Seventy-five percent of the participants reported that a very strong reason for liking their jobs (5 rating) came from the satisfaction they gained through contact with their students. The opportunity to have a meaningful impact on the lives of their students received the second highest percentage (73%).

Sodoma and Else (2009) utilized Herzberg's Motivation and Hygiene Theory to examine the job satisfaction of public school principals in Iowa. The researchers used questionnaires to compare the results of the 2005 Iowa principal job satisfaction survey with the results from a similar survey conducted in 1999 to determine if there were significant changes in job satisfaction in six years from 1999 to 2005. Their study sample included public school principals working in elementary, middle/junior, and high schools and the survey response rate was 64% in 2005 compared to 76% in 1999. The results showed that there were more satisfied principals in 2005 compared to 1999. Moreover, principals gained the most satisfaction from the interpersonal relationships they shared with teachers, parents, members of the school board, administrative colleagues, and the



superintendent of schools. On the other hand, principals were least satisfied with their salary, time commitments placed on them by their constituents, and the community image of school administrators (Sodoma & Else, 2009). These findings denote that principals were more satisfied with the hygiene factors and less satisfied with the motivation factors, thus contradiction Herzberg's theory (Sodoma & Else, 2009).

Friedman, Friedman and Markow (2008) studied the job satisfaction of 431 elementary, middle, and high school principals from 29 school districts across the United States. They used the results from a Harris poll to determine what factors were predictors of a principal's job satisfaction with their schools. Inclusion in decision-making, the quality of the school's physical plant and equipment, and student behavior were three factors that were directly related to principal job satisfaction. Similarly, Pijanowski and Brady (2009) noted that sitting principals and those individuals seeking to become principals cited working conditions, having less responsibilities, more personal support, and increased decision-making authority as factors that would be more beneficial to them and increase their job satisfaction. Conversely, they found that money was not enough to increase principal job satisfaction or to convince individuals to seek to become principals. The original intent of the study was to examine the influence of salary on attracting and retaining principals.

Other tangible motivating factors also play a significant role in individuals' decisions to remain in the principalship. As mentioned previously, Fraser and Brock (2006) found that financial security, particularly for male principals, was a major reason why Catholic school principals in Australia remained in their positions. Also, previously noted, Tekleselassie and Villarreal (2011) found that principals were more likely to stay

on the job if they (a) believed their job was a worthy one and (b) were satisfied with the district and enthusiastic about being a principal. These findings are aligned with Boyce and Bowers' (2015) claim that principals who were satisfied with the level of influence they have on the decision-making processes in schools, the school's climate, their salary, and have a positive attitude about being the principal were more likely to stay in the profession. Additionally, a sense of accomplishment (Ponder & Merrill, 2001; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002), student achievement and principal efficacy and development (Scott and Dinham 2003), job desirability (Stark-Price, Munoz, Winter, and Petrosko, 2006), opportunities for mentoring experiences (Washington-Bass, 2013), and opportunities for advancement (Ponder & Merrill, 2001) are factors that have been found to correlate positively with principal job satisfaction.

Ultimately, the most significant conclusions that can be drawn from the literature related principal job satisfaction are positive relationships with colleagues, students, and their superiors, autonomy support, increased decision-making authority, working condition, and profession development and mentoring are all factors that have been shown to increased job satisfaction (Chang, et al., 2015; Friedman, et al, 2008; Maforah & Shulze, 2012; Pijanowski & Brady, 2009; Sodoma & Else, 2009). As suggested by Locke's Range of Affect Theory (1976), closing the gap between principals' job satisfaction and the expectations they have for the job maybe a way to influence principals to remain in these challenging positions. Therefore, it is important that school superintendents and other direct supervisors explore avenues for building the self-efficacy of their principals (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012), offering timely and appropriate commendations and recognition for good work (Hancock & Müller, 2014), and giving

them multiple professional development opportunities (Washington-Bass, 2013). In addition, Pijanowski and Brady, 2009, suggests superintendents should take a proactive approach in exploring ways to reduce those activities (e.g. excessive emails, paperwork, meetings, and other distractions) that compete for principals' time thus limiting their efforts to work with students, support teachers and being true instructional leaders. Such actions would provide direct meaningful support to those persons who have made the principalship their chosen profession (Pinjanowski & Brady, 2009).

Several studies referenced in this review of the literature point to myriad reasons that principals leave their posts. Table 4 depicts (a) an overview of major research studies that have cited the various factors for principal attrition, mobility, and turnover and (b) studies from that same period that have noted the motivational factors that contributed to principal retention. None of the studies identified poor performance as a key factor in principals' decision to leave their positions. The researcher extrapolated most of the data on principal attrition, mobility and satisfaction from large state databases, school district administrative files, or local and state survey results. As previously mentioned, school demographics, socioeconomic status of student populations (e.g., concentrations of high poverty and FARMS students), salary, and principal personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race) were among the key drivers that contributed to principal attrition. Most notably, data show that principals prefer to lead schools with fewer minority, poor, and academically vulnerable students (Baker et al., 2010; Beteille et al., 2012; DeAngelis & White, 2011; Gates et al., 2006; Loeb et al. 2010; Papa Jr., 2007). In short, principals want to be in schools where the working conditions are par excellence. Conversely, principals have state that the number one driver of job satisfaction was the relationships

they cultivated with students, parents, and colleagues (Dipaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fraser & Brock, 2006; Maforah & Shulze, 2012; Malone et al., 2001; Sodoma & Else, 2009).

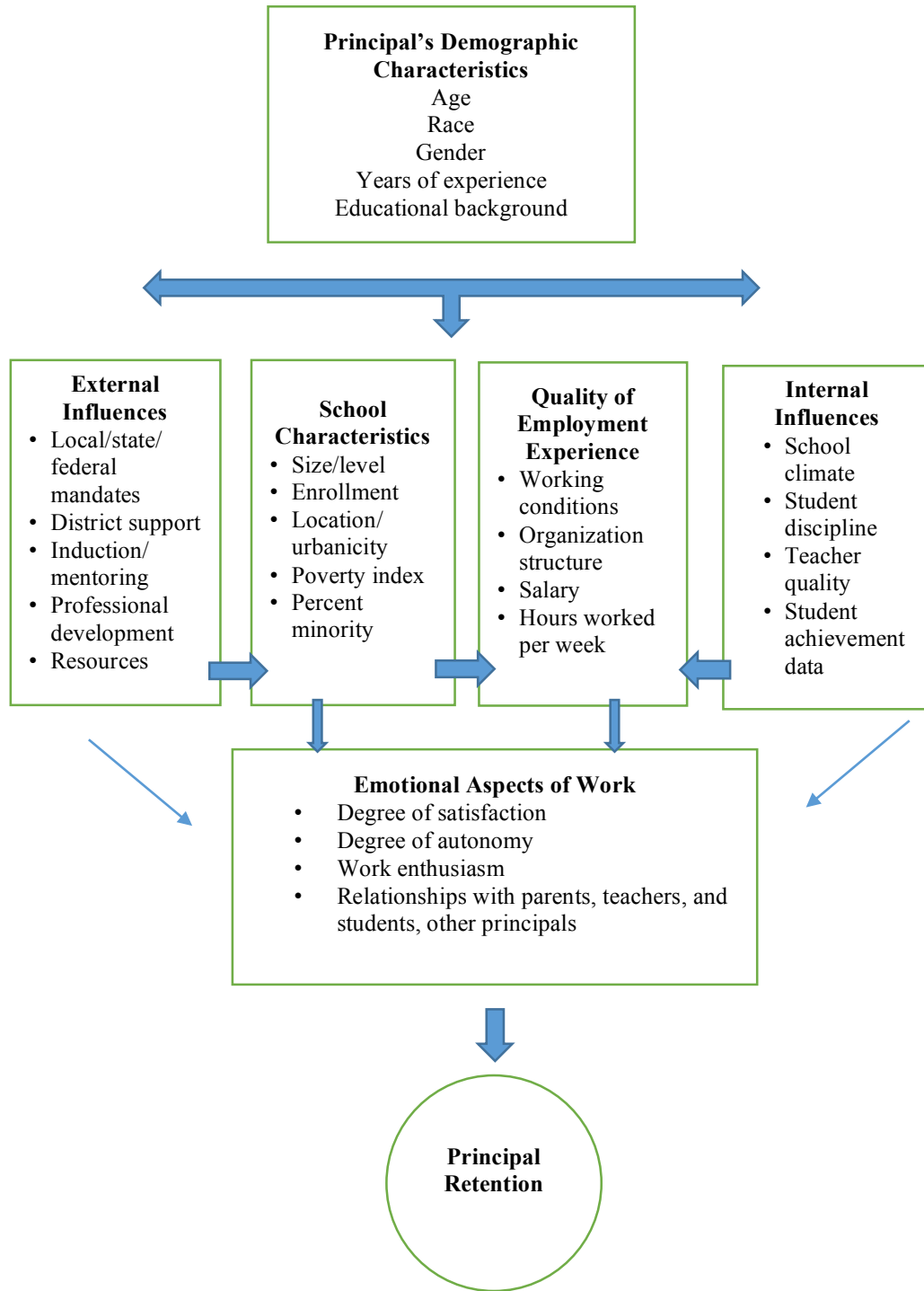
Table 4

*Principal Attrition and Retention*

Citation	Location	Factors attributed to departures	Citation	Location	Factors attributed to job satisfaction
Beteille et al. (2012)	Miami, Florida	School demographics	Chang, et al. (2015)	USA	Superintendent autonomy support
DeAngelis and White (2011)	Illinois	School demographics and principal characteristics	Federici and Skaalvik (2012),	Norway	Principal self-efficacy
Baker et al. (2010)	Missouri	Salary and school demographics	Maforah and Shulze (2012)	South Africa	Interpersonal relationships and salary
Loeb et al. (2010)	Miami, Florida	School demographics	Sodoma and Else (2009)	Iowa	Interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues
Papa Jr. (2007)	New York	Principal characteristics, salary, and school demographics	Pijanowski and Brady (2009)	USA	Working conditions and increased decision-making authority
Gates et al. (2006)	Illinois & North Carolina	School demographics	Fraser and Brock (2006)	Australia	Economic security, role enjoyment, and the opportunity to contribute
			Dipaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003)	Virginia	Interpersonal relationships with students, teachers, parents, and peers

While job satisfaction may come in many forms, principals clearly want to be recognized and appreciated for the work they do (The Chicago Public Education Fund, 2015; Hancock & Muller, 2014). As one high performing principal from Chicago Public school noted “No one has told me recently that I am doing a good job or that they want me to stay in my role” (The Chicago Public Education Fund, 2015, p. 4). Perhaps not receiving the adulation and recognition for performing this such high profile and increasingly stressful job are amongst the chief reasons principals are choosing not to remain in the profession.

Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the conceptual framework for this study. The framework details the factors associated with principal turnover and retention (e.g. individual principal characteristics [age, race, gender, etc.], quality of work/employment experiences [teacher quality, social supports, school climate, etc.], school characteristics [e.g. school size, location, minority population], and external influences [e.g. level of district support, mentoring, professional development, etc.]), which serve as predictors of the quality of a principal’s work experience. These characteristics and factors may contribute, in one way or another, to the emotional aspects of the work (e.g., work enthusiasm, degree of autonomy, interpersonal relationships, etc.), which for principals, help to predict job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and could possibly lead principal retention.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework of Principal Turnover and Retention

**Summary.** While the role of the school principal has evolved over the years, the significance of the job certainly has not diminished. Numerous research studies have stressed the role of principals as the chief stewards who are primarily responsible for leading successful school reform and improvement efforts. Studies have also shown that having a great principal in place for five to seven years is essential to leading effective school reform initiatives, developing a positive school culture, building positive working relationships, and improving student achievement (Branch, et al., 2013; Fuller & Young, 2008; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Vanderhaar, et al. 2006).

Researchers have found associations between the soaring level of principal attrition and other key factors, including (a) students' low performance on accountability assessments; (b) the complexities for the principalship; (c) large populations of poor and minority students; (d) the overwhelming and stressful nature of the job; (e) far too many unrealistic federal, state, and district accountability requirements; and (f) the lack of adequate financial resources and supplies (Baker, et al. 2010; Betteille, et al., 2012; Clark, et al 2009; Cushing, et al., 2003; DeAngelis & White, 2011; Gates, et al., 2006; Miller, 2013) Conversely, principals have cited enthusiasm about being a principal, autonomy, satisfaction with their degree of influence on the job, personal relationships, particularly those cultivated with their colleagues and their students, and financial security as reasons they are satisfied with their jobs (Boyce & Bowers, 2015; DiPaola & Moran, 2003; Fraser & Brock, 2006, Maforah & Shulze, 2012; Sodoma & Else, 2009; Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011).

Undoubtedly, the role of leadership in schools cannot be understated. Next to teaching, effective leadership has the greatest impact on students and advances their total

academic performance and achievement by 25% (Leithwood et al., 2004). Several researchers have found that keeping quality principals on the job is critical to schools' success (Beteille et al., 2012; Branch et al., 2013; The Chicago Public Education Fund, 2015; Fuller & Young, 2009; Leithwood et al. (2010); Miller, 2013; Seashore-Louis et al., 2010) because effective leaders have a multiplier effect on the teachers and students in their schools (New Leaders, n.d.). One effective principal can develop and retain 20 effective teachers, which, in turn, can lead to 500 student successes (New Leaders, n.d.). However, the process of school reform takes time and by-in-large, it usually takes five years for a principal to reach the zenith of his/her effectiveness (The Chicago Public Education Fund, 2015).

**National attempts to address and reduce principal turnover.** The recruitment and retention of high-quality principals has become a major concern and the number one priority for many school districts across the country (Manna, 2015). According to the School Leaders Network (SNL; 2014), one solution to the high principal turnover problem could be the adoption of district policies that provide funding for principal preparation programs that train candidates to lead important school reform efforts. However, SNL cautions that an approach that mainly focuses on individuals entering the profession would be short-sighted, because such an approach would ignore the host of other factors that influence the principal turnover or “churn” problem.

Manna (2015) suggested six policy levers that state leaders can explore to address principal turnover and ensure that all schools have greater opportunities to retain excellent principals:

- setting principal leadership standards;



- expanding efforts to recruit new principals into the profession;
- approving and monitoring principal preparation programs;
- licensing new and veteran principals;
- providing effective and sustained professional development that supports principals' growth; and
- conducting effective principal evaluations (p. 23).

To ensure that the new Professional Leadership standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) have the desired positive effect, Manna (2015) recommends that districts differentiate their standards among leaders (school and non-school based leaders), embedding them in their practices and reconcile them with other relevant district standards. Policymakers in Delaware, Iowa, Tennessee, and Kentucky used the former Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards to reconcile, strengthen and add coherence to their state standards (Manna, 2015). Manna continues that states can certainly play an important part in principal recruitment. While states do not have a direct role in compensating, hiring, and recruiting new principals, policy makers can certainly “alter the incentives to which aspiring principals and school districts respond” (Manna, 2015, p. 25).

Recently, Delaware, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, and New Mexico have invested in principal leadership academies to increase their recruiting efforts and attract new principals into the profession. Kentucky has operated its leadership academy since 1996 (Manna, 2015). States can also play a critical role in overseeing the organizations that prepare and train principals. In 2012-13, there were 706 institutions of higher learning that offered master's degrees in school and education supervision

(Manna, 2015). As noted by Anderson and Reynolds (2015), 29 states offer alternative routes to principal licensing. One alternative approach would be to allow work and life experiences as viable substitutions for traditional licensing (Manna, 2015).

Over the past decade, organizations like The Wallace Foundation have been at the forefront of efforts to investigate issues related to principal development and preparation and have published upwards of 70 reports and other literature related to school leadership (Wallace Foundation, 2011). In a 2011, the Wallace Foundation identified five key functions of effective principal leadership that were necessary to create successful schools. The study noted that successful principals are the architects of:

- a vision of academic success for all students
- a culture hospitable to education
- the cultivation of leadership in others
- instructional improvements
- the proper management of people, data, and processes that foster school improvement (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 4).

The report also stressed that the foundation for excellent principal leadership is built when all five tasks are well executed (Wallace Foundation, 2011). The Wallace Foundation has also encouraged school districts to develop, support, and sustain robust principal pipeline initiatives as viable solutions to their principal attrition and mobility problems, particularly in urban districts where the principal turnover is more pervasive (The Wallace Foundation, 2011). In 2011, the Wallace Foundation donated 75 million dollars to six urban school districts across the country, including PGCPs, to help fund principal pipeline initiatives. The goal of this national effort was to help the districts

develop a substantial pool of home-grown, effective school administrators that would be ready to step into the principalship whenever the need arises. To establish and sustain an effective pipeline, the Wallace Foundation recommended that school districts:

- develop leadership standards for principals;
- provide principals with extensive pre-service training;
- utilize selective hiring processes; and
- provide expansive on-the-job support for principals.

The Wallace Foundation (2011) forwarded the notion that if school districts recruited and developed their own effective principals, they could stem the attrition tide, and ultimately, improve student achievement outcomes, particularly in schools with the most need. Even though the establishment of sustainable principal pipelines are significant steps in the right direction, they only address principal preparation and largely ignore the more salient issue—principal retention.

**State attempts to address and reduce principal turnover in Maryland.** The state of Maryland began providing support for principal development and preparation in 2000. That year, State Superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick convened the Maryland Task Force on the Principalship, which resulted in the recommendation that the state ramp up its efforts to recruit, train, retain, and reward quality school leaders (Maryland State Department of Education [MSDE], n.d.). Subsequently, in 2000, MSDE established the Maryland Principals' Academy, a yearlong professional development experience that focused on building the instructional leadership capacity of principals with one-to-five years of experience. In 2007, along with the Eastern Shore of Maryland Education Consortium, MSDE co-sponsored the state's first Aspiring Principals' Institute, which

primarily focused on building the leadership capacity of assistant principals with the hope that they would later become principals (MSDE, n.d.).

In 2013, under the guidance of State Superintendent Lillian Lowery, MSDE utilized RttT funding to establish a Breakthrough Center for Leadership Development. The primary purpose of the center was to provide turn-around services to the bottom five percent of schools in the state. The main stated goal of this initiative is to

Provide professional development and technical assistance at the system and school level to build the instructional capacity of school principals and support instructional leadership teams in the lowest-achieving schools in Baltimore City, Prince George's County and Dorchester County Public Schools. (MSDE, n.d.)

Additionally, in 2013, at the request of Lowery, the Maryland State Board of Education adopted a comprehensive principal induction program (COMAR 13A.07.10) to strengthen the preparation and instructional leadership capabilities of first-year principals. In her memorandum to the Board of Education, Lowery noted that “prior experience, appropriate coursework, and an effective principal induction program are critical if we are to sustain and indeed exceed the gains that Maryland has seen over the years” (MSDE, n.d.).

Finally, to improve principal recruitment efforts, MSDE established the Governor's Promising Principal Academy in 2015. This yearlong program provides support and training for assistant principals who have a desire to become principals. Mitchell (2015) noted that educational leaders applauded Maryland's initiative to tap assistant principals as an ambitious and deliberate way of upgrading the state's leadership ranks. While state regulations and other efforts underscored the importance of supporting

neophyte principals, they placed no such emphasis on addressing principal turnover. Further, school districts in Maryland have regularly reported information about teacher turnover and mobility rates to MSDE; however, similar information about principals is seemingly unavailable. This disparity highlights Manna's (2015) claim that when it comes to education effectiveness, policy makers have focused the lion's share of their efforts on teachers.

**Local attempts to address principal turnover.** As a part of the Wallace initiative, NDPSD received \$12.5 million over the span of five years to build four key parts of its principal pipeline program and ensure a satisfactory number of principals were prepared to accommodate district needs for qualified school leaders. Thus, far, the key facets of principal development in NDPSD have focused on (a) development of leader standards, (b) pre-service preparation, (c) selective hiring, and (d) sustained on-the-job support (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, & MacFarlane, 2013). In addition to partnering with The Wallace Foundation to develop and strengthen its principal pipeline, NDPSD also collaborated with the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) to design and implement an Aspiring Leaders Program for Student Success (ALPSS) for assistant principals (APs) who expressed a desire to become principals. Since its inception, ALPSS has become a cornerstone of the system's principal recruitment, selection, training, support and practicum experiences (NDPSD Talent Development Programs. n.d.).

Additionally, NDPSD utilized RtT funds to create initiatives with New Leaders for New Schools and School Leaders Network to support leadership development as a means developing of high-quality principals to serve in the system. The district also used

RttT resources to partner with local colleges and universities to establish a principal preparation program that met the needs of the system. In addition, NDPSD developed doctoral programs for sitting principals and central office staff in conjunction with Howard University and the University of Maryland (Turnbull et al., 2013). The district subsidized half the cost of the tuition for individuals accepted into these programs. In turn, everyone signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that required a three-year commitment to the district upon successful completion of the doctoral programs.

Finally, continuing along the leadership development spectrum, NDPSD rolled out its Resident Principals Preparation Program in the summer of 2015. This yearlong prescriptive internship and residency program was designed to give prospective principal candidates the opportunity to work on specific leadership skillsets with carefully selected principals at the principals' respective schools. The program also gradually increased the responsibilities of the resident principal over time, with the individual eventually assuming sole responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the school for a 12-week period. The initiative focused on supporting leadership development and providing the district with a viable pipeline of homegrown talent.

While each of these efforts represents an important step in developing a pipeline to fill principal vacancies as they arise, none have addressed how to remedy the issue of principal turnover. Although one can infer that having a robust principal pipeline of qualified individuals will ultimately satisfy future leadership voids, the overarching question of how the district can retain its exceptional principals remains at the forefront of the conversation regarding principal turnover. Fuller, Orr, and Young (2008) noted that "schools and school reform efforts simply cannot be successful unless high-quality

principals remain at the same school for extended periods of time” (p. 2). Fuller et al. (2008) also explained that providing principals with necessary support and development early in their careers, and awarding additional financial benefits to individuals who work in schools with high minority and low-income student populations, could be vital catalysts in retaining principals. According to Dave Levin, co-founder of the Knowledge is Power Program college-preparatory schools (KIPP), the key to retaining highly qualified principals is making sure each principal is a good fit for his or her school (Schimel, 2015). This factor is a critical and will go a long way in determining the principal’s success, as well as the success of the school (White & Agarwal, 2011). Levin also noted that encouraging principals to write a list of their own expectations for the job; engaging them in their work; giving them a voice in the process, and rewarding them for remaining in the on the job are all strategies that have helped KIPP’s principal retention rate rise from 75% in 2009 to 91% in 2013. (Schimel, 2015).

Furthermore, according to principal respondents in a study conducted by White and Agarwal (2011), the following support from their district’s central office would improve their job satisfaction and increase the likelihood of that they would remain in their positions:

- providing them more robust and sustained central office support;
- expanding their autonomy and giving them more instructional leadership flexibility and a greater voice in the decision-making processes;
- mentoring support for new principals;
- decreasing the amount of time principals spend on compliance issues, thus increasing their time in the classroom with students and teachers; and

- offering them with opportunities to meet and dialog with their principal colleagues about finding innovative solutions to common problems.

White and Agarwal concluded that, above all else, providing principals with multiple pathways to expand their learning would improve their job satisfaction. In addition, principals also want professional development activities that are differentiated and unique to their needs and the needs of their schools (The Chicago Public Education Fund, 2015). For example, in Chicago Public Schools, principals have suggested that the annual professional development calendar

[Cover] fewer topics in a more in-depth manner and foster coordination among the professional development providers; differentiate sessions that meet their individual needs and allow for self-selection among multiple choice; and professional development that illuminates examples of good practice and speaks to their current needs. (Chicago Public Education Fund, 2015, p. 5)

Perhaps the signing of *ESSA* in December 2015 by President Obama will encourage states and local school districts to utilize Title II funding to provide professional development support for school leaders which in turn may stimulate greater principal retention.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Thus, this research study seeks to explore factors leading to lengthy tenure as a middle school principal. In his 2011 study on school leadership, Slater recommended that “*future research in education administration should address the lives of principals expressed in their own voices*” (p. 7). Moreover, the current research seeks to offer expanded knowledge regarding the major influences on the tenure of middle school



principals, including both challenges and rewards. Further, this study is structured to explore some of the unique sociocultural, pedagogical, and personal factors leading to principals' decisions to remain within a given middle school.

The following overarching research questions will guide the data collection and analysis strategies for this study:

- 1 What institutional and sociocultural factors contribute to lengthy tenure for middle school principals?
- 2 What are the salient personal and professional characteristics of principals with lengthy tenure in a middle school?
- 3 How do principals with two or more years of tenure in a middle school view their relationships with stakeholders in the building—students, faculty, and staff?
- 4 How do principals with two or more years of tenure in a middle school view their relationships with stakeholders outside the building—parents, community leaders, and central administration?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Attrition:* the unpredictable and uncontrollable, but normal, reduction of work force due to resignations, retirement, sickness, or death (businessdictionary.com, n.d.)

*Job satisfaction:* the ways that people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their jobs; it is the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs (Spector, 1997)

*Middle school*: a school for children that usually includes Grades 6-8 or just Grades 7 and 8 (www.merriam-webster.com, n.d.)

*Mobility*: the extent to which workers are able or willing to move between different jobs, occupations, and geographical areas (www.businessdictionary.com, n.d.)

*Principal*: the lead building-level administrator

*Turnover rate*: the number of employees hired to replace those who left, were reassigned, or were fired during a 12-month period (www.businessdictionary.com, n.d.)

*Principal turnover*: one principal exiting a school and being replaced by a new principal (Cullen & Mazzeo, 2008)

*Principal retention*: the act of keeping and retaining qualified and successful principals on the job.

## **Section II: Research Methods**

To date, researchers exploring principal mobility have relied upon large-scale state data sets and survey results to identify school and individual principal characteristics that influence these school leaders' decision to move from their positions (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Baker et al., 2010; Battle & Gruber, 2010; Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; DeAngelis & White, 2011; Fuller & Young, 2010; Gates et al., 2006; Goldring & Taie, 2014; Papa, 2007; Partlow, 2007). While these studies have offered valuable insight into principal mobility, they do not provide an intimate look at the individual principals and the factors that compel the administrators to remain in high-profile, high-stress positions. This qualitative study examined the perceptions of middle school principals in NDPSD who chose to remain in their schools for two or more consecutive years.

This chapter presents the purpose statement and research questions that guided this inquiry, as well as a discussion of the study's design, methods and procedures, participants, instruments, and data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter will also outline the confidentiality procedures used to protect the identity of the subjects and the limitations of the study.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to identify the experiences and factors, both institutional and personal, that influenced select NDPSD middle school principals' decision to remain in the same position for more than two years. The following research questions served as the focus of this study. The researcher adapted the questions from Luebke's (2013) qualitative study of 10 high school principals in Wisconsin to make them more relevant to middle school principals in the present study's target schools. Dr. Luebke provided written permission (see appendix I) allowing the researcher to adapt and utilize the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What institutional and sociocultural factors are present that contribute to lengthy tenure for middle school principals?
- **Research Question 2:** What are the salient personal and professional characteristics of principals with lengthy tenure in a middle school?
- **Research Question 3:** How do principals with two or more years of tenure in a middle school view their relationships with stakeholders in the building—students, faculty, and staff?

- **Research Question 4:** How do principals with two or more years of tenure in a middle school view their relationships with stakeholders outside the building—parents, community leaders, and central administration?

### **Research Design**

The researcher sought to respond to the aforementioned questions by conducting a qualitative study that employed a phenomenological research design. According to Yin (2015), qualitative research involves the use of a broad range of research and data collection methods that examine participants' perceptions of and experiences with the phenomenon of study. Qualitative research also serves as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem and involves the participants' use of words, thoughts, perceptions, and experiences to articulate their beliefs about the topic of study (Creswell, 2014). Creswell also defined phenomenology as inquiry-based research that draws from both psychology and philosophy. Through phenomenological exploration, the researcher describes the participant's lived experiences with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2014).

This researcher conducted a descriptive narrative inquiry that examined the reasons that middle school principals chose to remain in their high-stress positions at the same campuses for two or more consecutive years. Creswell (2012) noted,

It is appropriate to use qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that can be measured, or hear silenced voices. These are all good reasons to explore a problem rather than to use predetermined information from the literature or rely on results from other research studies. We

also conduct qualitative research because we need a complex detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expected to find or what we have read in the literature. (pp. 47-48)

Most of the existing research related to principal attrition and turnover has been quantitative in nature and has utilized state databases and surveys to analyze data on principal behaviors. These studies have overwhelmingly focused on the reasons that principals leave schools or districts (not on why they might stay) and have not sought to understand the phenomenon from the principals' perspective, using their own voices. Creswell (2013) noted the following:

We use qualitative research to follow up quantitative research and help explain the mechanisms or linkages in causal theories or models. These theories provide a general picture of trends, associations and relationships, but they do not tell us about why people responded as they did, the context in which they responded, and their deeper thoughts and behaviors that governed their responses. (p.48)

This study expands on existing qualitative studies that have examined principal movement to explore the reasons principals are choosing to stay in their positions, the forces that influence their decisions, and their thoughts and insights about the factors contribute to their decision. To obtain this data, the investigator conducted in-depth interviews with the selected research participants to examine and analyze their professional life experiences.

Schwandt (2007) described narrative inquiry as follows: “The interdisciplinary study of activities involved in generating and analyzing stories of life experiences (e.g., life histories, narrative interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs autobiographies, and biographies) and reporting that kind of research” (pp. 203-204). Clandinin and Huber (2010) noted that narrative inquiry affords researchers an avenue to ponder and investigate informant’s experiences. Schwandt (2007) further contended that the narrative interview serves to extract narrative data from a respondent or interviewee’s story (i.e. a significant episode, personal experience or history). This notion aligns with Creswell’s (2012) assertion that a descriptive narrative approach relies on people and places to sustain the narrative and may share a “typical day in the life” of an individual (p. 274). Marshall and Rossman (2006) added that, above all else, narrative inquiry surmises that people formulate their essences through recounting their stories. In turn, the researcher explores and records the story as told by the participant.

**Study site.** This study took place in NDPSD, a large school system in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States of America. The district is comprised of over 120,000 students from a broad swath of urban, suburban, and rural communities. NDPSD has 208 schools and employs more than 18000 individuals. The 208 schools are comprised of 124 elementary schools, 24 middle schools, 30 high schools, 10 specialty program schools, 10 public charter schools, six academies, and five regional schools. The middle schools included in this study are traditional comprehensive public middle schools in NDPSD that house Grades 6-8 or 7-8. Charter schools, alternative schools or programs, or specialty schools created from within the selected school district were not included in the study.

## **Methods and Procedures**

**Participants and sample selection.** The researcher employed a homogeneous sampling technique to identify participants for the study. In using homogenous sampling, the researcher “purposefully selected participants who are very similar in experience, perspective, or outlook” (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 139). In this case, all individuals in the sample were middle school principals with a tenure of at least two consecutive years in the same schools. Along with homogenous sampling, the study employed criterion sampling to identify potential participants. By employing criterion sampling, the researcher “selected all cases that [met] some criterion or [had] some characteristic” (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 139). For this study, as mentioned previously, the participants were all middle school principals (homogenous sampling) from NDPSD with two or more consecutive years in their current position at the same school (criterion sampling), as of the end of the 2016-17 school year, and who returned to the same position for the 2017-18 school year.

The Institutional Review Board of the University of Maryland granted approval for the researcher to conduct this study (see Appendix A). The researcher also sought and received permission from the Research and Evaluation office of the NDPSD to interview the middle school principals (see Appendix B). The researcher used the NDPSD district and school websites to identify middle school principals who met the identified criteria and contacted eligible candidates individually via telephone to confirm that they had the requisite tenure to participate in the study. This process resulted in the identification of 17 eligible participants, who each received a letter and an email explaining the study and requesting their participation. The correspondence also noted that their participation was

completely voluntary and that there were absolutely no consequences for any individual who chooses not to participate in the study. Table 5 summarizes the demography of the ten middle school principals that participated in this study.

Table 5

*Research Participants*

ID#	Age range	Gender M/F	Years in position	Years in school admin.	Highest degree	Traditional admin. certification Y/N	Middle school admin. certification Y/N	Reside in the district Y/N
BT1	40-49	M	2	11	Master's	Y	N	N
CW2	50-59	M	9	22	Master's	Y	N	Y
FM3	60+	F	12	16	Master's	Y	N	Y
KC4	40-49	F	7	13	Master's	Y	N	Y
MD5	40-49	F	7	12	Master's	Y	N	Y
GM6	30-39	M	3	3	Master's	Y	N	Y
MT7	40-49	F	5	17	Master's	Y	N	Y
CD8	40-49	M	4	16	Doctorate	Y	N	Y
MJ9	40-49	F	3	8	Master's	Y	N	Y
SK10	50-59	M	6	11	Master's	Y	N	Y

Ten of the 17 individuals agreed to serve as research participants. Table 5 details demographic characteristics of the ten participants substituting case numbers for names to maintain anonymity. After finalizing the sample, the researcher contacted each subject by telephone and secured a time and place for individual interviews. All principals chose to schedule their interview in their office at the end of the school day. Prior to the start of each interview, each participant signed the University of Maryland Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C), which outlined details of the inquiry, and had an opportunity to pose any questions about the study. Additionally, each participant completed a demographic background questionnaire (see Appendix D).

**Data Collection**



Bogdan and Biklen (2011) stated that qualitative studies “usually employ the techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviewing” (p. 2). Since this will be an exploratory study, in-depth interviewing will be the chosen method of data collection. Seidman (2006) explained that the purpose of in-depth interviews is “not to get answers to questions or to test hypotheses, but simply to understand the lived experiences of others and to make meaning of that experience” (p.9).

Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted several benefits of utilizing in-depth interviews. First, they noted that in-depth interviews allow research participants to describe their perspectives of the world in which they exist. Second, the face-to-face nature of the interviews can supply a wealth of contextual data, in the form of words and quotes, that the researcher can later use to corroborate findings. Finally, interviews provide the researcher with instant feedback and a direct avenue to clarify data, when necessary (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As Seidman (2006), explained, the ultimately goal of in-depth interviews is “to have the participants reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (p. 15).

This researcher used one semi-structured interview with open-ended questions with each participant as the singular mode of data collection for this study. Open-ended questions aided the researcher in exploring and building on each participant’s responses to the items on the interview protocol (Seidnam, 2006). Seidman (2006) recommends a series of three interviews provides a basis for a more comprehensive data collection process in qualitative studies. However, despite this recommendation, Seidman allowed for flexibility with the three-interview option “if a structure is maintained that allows

participants to reconstruct and reflect on their experiences within the context of their lives” (p. 21).

In this study, each participant took part in one compressed interview. The questions were structured in a way that enabled the participants to reflect upon and reconstruct the portions of their experiences that were important to them and contributed to their decision to remain in the principalship for a lengthy period. Minimizing the number of interviews from three to one was ideal considering the busy schedules of middle school principals and the fact that some individuals may have been unwilling to commit to a series of interviews. Each interview lasted for approximately 15-to-40 minutes. The questions presented during the interview allowed the participants to provide context and detail about their past and present experiences and explored the meaning of the participants’ experience within the established context. All the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy when recalling the participants’ responses. The interview protocol is provided in the appendix G.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Creswell (2012) stated, “Accuracy and credibility of your findings are of the utmost importance” (p.259). He defined validity as the development of sound evidence to demonstrate that the intended test interpretation (of the concept or construct that the test is assumed to measure) matches the proposed purpose of the test. This evidence is based on test content, responses processes, internal structure, relations to other variables, and the consequences of testing (Creswell 2012). For the present study, the researcher used two approaches to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings and interpretations—peer debriefing and member checking.

**Peer debriefing.** The researcher used peer debriefing as a validity tool. In the peer debriefing process, the researcher relies on a knowledgeable and trusted peer to review research data and ask questions about the study “so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher” (Creswell, 2014 p. 202). For the present study, the researcher requested assistance from two former middle school principals whose perspectives helped to shape the questions used for the interview and the themes that emerged from the interviews.

**Member checking.** The researcher utilized member checking to ensure the validity of the findings in this study. Creswell (2012) provided the following insights into member checking:

Member checking is the process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account. This involves taking the findings back to participants and asking them (in writing or an interview) about the accuracy of the report. (p. 259)

For this study, member checking involved the sharing of the interview transcripts with each participant and the soliciting their feedback about the specific findings and/or themes of the study to determine the accuracy of the results.

### **Data Analysis**

After completing the interview with each principal, the researcher utilized the Rev.com transcription service to transcribed each interview recording verbatim. Creswell (2012) explained that transcription is the process of converting audiotape recordings into text data. The researcher analyzed the interview data using QSR International NVivo 10, a software program that facilitated the collection, organization, and analysis of the

transcribed information. Using NVivo's powerful search, query, and visualization tools, the researcher conducted a thorough analysis, then labeled and divided the data into categories that represented general themes, patterns, and categories that were relevant to the established research questions. This inductive process continued until a comprehensive set of themes had developed that led to several inferences and conclusions about the transcribed and coded data.

### **Confidentiality**

The researcher took great pains to maintain the confidentiality of all the participants in every aspect of this study. The researcher assigned an individual pseudonym to each participant and change their school names. To the greatest extent plausible, school demographic information was explained in terms that did not identify any specific school.

Participation in the interviews was completely voluntary, and the researcher took steps to ensure that all participants would not experience any risk through participation in this study. The researcher also ensured that his role in the district, for purposes of this study, was understood and that he was willing, if necessary, to employ a third party to disseminate the surveys. The researcher also thoroughly explained the purpose of the study to all participants, shared the security and confidentiality information, and obtained consent from all participants. Finally, every effort will be made, within the appropriate guidelines, not to reveal any data that could identify or harm any of the participants. All interview notes and transcripts will be kept in a locked file and/or password protected computer file throughout the research process. After the study has been completed, all the

audiotapes and transcripts will be retained in a secure location for three years, per university guidelines; after which time, they will be destroyed.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this study. First, all of the participants in this study worked in one urban school district in the state of Maryland. Some of them may have known each other personally and professionally, and may naturally have shared similar views and perspectives. As a result, the data acquired from this research may be difficult to generalize satisfactorily to a larger population. Secondly, the researcher was a former middle school principal and high school assistant principal and possesses a vast amount of knowledge and familiarity with, and a substantial interest in, the subject of the research study. However, the researcher recognizes that his skill set, prior knowledge, and understanding of the issue at hand also adds strength to the study. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined a researcher's experience with the topic of study as one of the 'strengths' of a qualitative researcher, granted that the researcher, as warned by Moustakas (1994), sets aside all forms of conjecture regarding what may be discovered during the inquiry.

It is important to note, however, that this researcher's knowledge also magnifies concerns relating to the possibility of researcher bias. Having served for nine years as a middle school principal and for five years as a high school assistant principal in the same school district as many of the respondents in this research study, the researcher acknowledges that there is some possibility of bias in his interactions with former colleagues.

Additionally, considering the positive relationships that the researcher has cultivated over the years with his former colleagues, it is safe to conclude that a sincere

discourse occurred during the interviews that added to the depth of the study and increased the likelihood that the researcher would be able to collect sound data that related to the research questions. However, in accord with Daniels (1995), the researcher acknowledges that some respondents might have adjusted their answers to convey a congenial perspective of themselves, a current supervisor, students, parents, the board of education, or the school district.

Recognizing that researcher bias is always a possibility, Miles and Huberman (1994) noted, "In qualitative research, issues of instrument validity and reliability ride largely on the skills of the researcher," (p. 38). However, member checks and peer reviews serve as a meaningful countermeasure to limit any such bias (Merriam, 2002). Additionally, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted that the rigorous separation of investigator(s) and respondent(s) is not necessary when using a narrative inquiry format in qualitative research. These scholars also explained the following:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Further, Clandinin and Huber (2010) stated, "Narrative inquiry is a process of entering into the lives in the midst of each participant's and each inquirer's life," and concluded, "Narrative inquirers cannot subtract themselves from the inquiry relationship" (p. 4).

Finally, due to the qualitative nature of this study, the principal perspective was salient and made the data easy to validate through member checking. However, triangulating the data was challenging the data was challenging because the study was

comprised merely of one face-to-face interview with each participant and lacked observation journals or researcher field notes.

While these limitations may have affected the findings, the researcher sought to reduce their impact by holding to the belief that middle school principal retention is paramount to students' academic, emotional, and social success. Additionally, by acknowledging the advantage of the researcher's prior experience as a middle school principal and strong conviction about chronicling the experiences of middle school principals in their own voices, the researcher remained resolute in limiting potential bias by maintaining an open mind and exuding a strong commitment to hearing the perspectives and experiences of all respondents throughout the study.

### **Section III: Results, Conclusions, and Impact**

This study provided the researcher an opportunity to explore the factors that influence middle school principals' decision to remain in their current position for at least two consecutive years. As discussed in the previous sections, a review of the existing literature reveals limited research on this particular population and the salient variables that shape the career-related decisions that they make. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with a purposively-selected sample of principals working in a large, urban school district located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Items within the interview protocol were structured to collect data on the viewpoints and values that related to the sampled principals' choice to remain in their positions or pursue other career options.

This section presents a discussion of the results, conclusions, and impact of the study findings. The section begins with details about the characteristics of the sample, then moves into the analysis of the data gathered during the face-to-face interviews. Four major research questions guided the data collection and analysis processes:

1. What institutional and sociocultural factors contribute to lengthy tenure for middle school principals?
2. What are the salient personal and professional characteristics of principals with lengthy tenure in a middle school?
3. How do principals with two or more years of tenure in a middle school view their relationships with stakeholders in the building– (i.e., students, faculty, and staff)?



4. How do principals with two or more years of tenure in a middle school view their relationships with stakeholders outside of the building– (i.e., parents, community leaders, and central administration)?

Given the qualitative nature of this study, the discussions are augmented with tabular summaries of response trends from the sample. The tabular summaries identify emergent themes that reflected the views, values, and experiences of the principals interviewed for the study. Representative responses that capture essential ideas offered by interviewees are listed in the summaries, along with indicators of response frequency.

Conclusions and implications follow the discussion of results. These conclusions and implications were carefully gleaned from trends found within the interview data. The researcher also discusses the implications of the findings for school districts and provides suggestions for improving retention levels among principals heading middle schools. Additionally, the researcher offers projective and prescriptive notions for possible improvements in administrative functioning for the school district, which are likely to have a notable impact on performance outcomes for children. The section concludes with a few thoughts for future research in the area of principal tenure, particularly for inquiries that focus on middle school principals.

### **Sample Characteristics**

Consistent with the qualitative nature of this current study, the sampling approach was non-probabilistic and purposive, with the objective of selecting cases with very specific experiential backgrounds. A major goal of this study was to examine retention factors for individuals holding positions as middle-school principals. Thus, sampling methods targeted individuals meeting the experiential criteria with a large, urban school

district located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. In total, the researcher selected 10 middle school principals for the research sample—five females and five males. Most the principals (n=6), indicated their age level as being in range of 40 to 49 years. One sampled principal indicated an age level in the range of 30 to 39 years, two were in the range of 50 to 59 years, and one sampled principal indicated an age at the level of 60 years or above. Regarding annual income, most the sampled principals (n=6) indicated an income level in the range of \$110,000 to \$129,000, with the remaining four cases noting an annual income level in the range of \$130,000 to \$149,000.

The structured questionnaire also focused on the participants' academic preparation and certification status. Nine of the respondents had attained master's degrees, and one individual had earned a doctoral degree. Eight cases within the sample held a teacher certification, six of whom acquired the credentials through university-based programs. The other two individuals with teacher certification acquired their credentials through alternative programs. Actual teaching experiences for the sample were broad, including stints in elementary, middle, and high schools.

Four respondents had multiple teaching assignments at all grade levels, and three taught only in high schools. Two participants had teaching experiences exclusively at the elementary school level. Content areas reflected in the sample's experiential profile varied notably and included reading, language arts, history, English, science, and mathematics. Two of the cases had served as a school counselor or peer mediation specialist prior to becoming a building administrator.

At the time of data collection, all the research participants held a principal certification acquired through a university-based program. None of the participants held a

specific certification for the middle school principalship. Additionally, the respondents spent an average of 6.2 years as assistant principals, with a median of 5 years, and a range of 1 to 13 years, in such positions. The participants served as middle-school principals for an average of 7.1 years, with a median of 7 years and a range of 2 to 14 years as school leaders (See Table 5)

### **Analysis for Research Question 1**

This research study was designed to explore the sociocultural, pedagogical, and personal factors that proved most salient in the career-related decisions of selected middle school principals. Research Question 1 centered on institutional and sociocultural factors that shaped decisions of sampled middle school principals to remain at the same school for two or more years. Specifically, the research question asked, “What institutional and sociocultural factors contribute to lengthy tenure for middle school principals?”

To address this query, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with each of the participants, which resulted in a comprehensive set of qualitative data that were condensed and summarized into thematic categories reflecting salient viewpoints and perspectives of the sample. Table 6 provides a summary of the thematic categories derived from responses to the sociocultural component of Research Question 1. Note that each interviewee was strategically identified by an ID number in Table 5. This identification method allowed the researcher to reference the subjects without compromising their anonymity. In any research endeavors, confidentiality and anonymity are necessary, yet the process of presenting data without compromising an interviewee's identification can be particularly challenging (Babbie, 1973; Selltiz,

Wrightman, & Cook, 1976).

Table 6 presents two emergent themes. These themes represent the viewpoints of the respondents that related to the sociocultural and institutional components of Research Question 1.

Table 6

*Emergent Themes for Research Question 1 and Frequencies*

#	Emergent themes	Frequency	
		Sources	References
1	Altruism: Concern for marginalized student population	10	32
2	Altruism: Money doesn't matter	6	8

An analysis of the interview data revealed that principals typically discussed in detail the concern that they had for their marginalized student population. Principals exhibited their altruistic behaviors by discussing how important it was for them to create a change in these students' lives. Further, when discussing the salary offered by the district for the principal role, many school administrators agreed that the money did not matter—they did not get into the job for the money. For example, the following quotes are evidence of this emergent theme of altruism in the form of the respondents' concern for their marginalized student population.

*And we have a great group of students so that's a huge part of me maybe remaining in this position. Several times when I feel like I'm drenched with Administrative stuff a lot of times I'll stop and say I wanna go be with the students. Because that helps me remember why I'm here and why I'm in the field*

*of education. So, they play a very instrumental factor as to why I remain in principalship. (KCM4)*

*Being an impact to change. So many of my students are on the poverty level so it's also being in a position to provide resources for these students. That's not only professional but my personal motivation with that, to be there and be an impact for those students. (CDT8)*

*I mean we didn't use to have as many Hispanic children as we do. Now we have a whole lot more, but they don't come with no worries. I mean with everything that is going on in politics and DACA and whatever, you know we have to tell the front office, "If you don't know who these people are, you are not to call any of our children. They will not be coming here and picking them up and taking them to deport them." And we have kids that are coming from Afghanistan and Syria and like war-torn countries that also need every bit of help. But in general, really it doesn't affect me. I mean the population is the population no matter what the population is. (FMK3)*

*My children look like me. It's definitely another driving force. The fact that I'm teaching my own. It gives me more energy to come to work every day because I know I'm doing something that's benefiting my own people. (GMS6)*

*My main motivating factor is the fact that my kids look like me and that I can change their lives by how much their educated. That's why I do it. (GMS6)*

*Truthfully, when I wake up in the morning, the only thing I really think about is students. Then when I get here, I'm happy to see when the parents drop their kids off saying, 'Good morning,' seeing the smiles on kids' faces, saying, 'Good morning,' things of that nature. That's really my motivating factor. That's what motivates me for our student achievement, because I want to make that connection with kids and make them feel that even the smallest thing that they do is a big achievement. If it's just coming in, you just walking through the door, at least you came to school. Attendance is achievement for me. You going to class on time, that's an achievement. Just little, small things keep me motivated. (BTH1)*

*That's my job. My job is to help children to excel and move forward, so I'm okay with that. It's a challenge, and I know that ... My whole motto is there are great things that can come from the inner-city child. I was one of the students that I service. And so, I'm committed to them, I'm committed to giving them the best environment possible to learn and flourish in. (MTN7)*

*I love the students. I mean, I look at this job as one of service. That's something we try to talk about a lot in our school. That's why you do it; you do it for the kids. We do it for the kids. And if that ever went away, then I'd have to do something different. (CWO2)*

These quotes provide salient examples of the respondents' altruistic ways of thinking in regards to their students and demonstrate the degree to which their heart for service and for improving the lives of students serves as a key source of motivation.

The next set of examples provide evidence of the second emergent theme of altruism in

the form of the respondents' perception that money is not as important as the work they are doing.

*I long ago decided that educators don't get paid what they're worth, so, like for example, principal's I think, if I had gone on the corporate America path, and I had to manage the same budget, same number of people, I'd probably make two or three times as much working for someone else. If I had my own business that had the same staff, four or five times as much. I just think ... I gave up on that a long time ago. (SAK10)*

*Well no compensation is not a [laughs] factor for me to remain, because we know that in education period we're underpaid. So that's not a factor, a determine factor whether I'll remain or not. (KCM4)*

*There's no amount of compensation, I believe, financially that you can receive to do the job that we do because it is a job that is different each and every day, and it's a different challenge each and every day. The one thing I will say that it is a compensation is that you can actually see, unlike some other jobs, the fruits of your labor. So you actually can see the students grow and change. You can see the parents become a little more comfortable with their students' transition to middle school, and you can actually see parents growing and learning as well. So that compensation, I believe, is what drives you and keeps you moving. But, financially, if you're in it for the money, then you're in the wrong career path anyway...financial compensation, no. (MGD5)*

*When you're doing what you really love to do, compensation is at the bottom of the list on why you come back, you know? (FMK3)*

*Compensation's okay it could be better. It's definitely not where some of the colleagues are, but again, I don't do it for the money. So it doesn't have an affect one way or the other. I do feel that we need to be compensated for our work.*

*However, it's not like I want to do this because I want to make a certain amount of money. That's not why I'm here. (GMS6)*

*I know you could make more other places, but a lot of people who leave for that end up coming back, because there's other things that you can't put a price on. (CWO2)*

The findings presented in Table 6 and the quotes demonstrating the emerging themes reveal meaningful response patterns within the data related to Research Question 1. The principals sampled in this study strongly suggested that the academic achievement, socioeconomic status, and racial and ethnic composition of traditionally underserved student populations were the most salient reasons behind their decision to (a) become middle school principals and (b) continue their tenure as principal at the same middle school for two or more consecutive years. Students were the principals' top priority, regardless of the salaries they earned.

The respondents also identified three additional key priorities, including building positive and sustainable relationships with students and parents, providing good customer service, and establishing a safe school environment that encourages students to grow and thrive. The participants shared a variety of other viewpoints related to Research Question 1 throughout the interviews; however, the previously-noted themes



reflected the responses offered by most participants. The prevailing concept within these emergent themes for Research Question 1 is rather clear—most principals in the research sample expressed a strong commitment to the children served by their middle school. This sense of altruism for students appeared to be a primary factor in the respondents’ decision to remain in their position at their respective schools for two or more years.

### **Analysis for Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 focused on the more personal dimensions of individuals serving as school leaders for extended periods of time. Specifically, the question asked, “What are the salient personal and professional characteristics of principals with lengthy tenure in a middle school?” The researcher employed the same analytical strategy used in the previous discussion to examine the data related to this research question—the researcher condensed and summarized the interview data into thematic categories to highlight the key viewpoints and perspectives of the sample. Table 7 presents a summary of the thematic category derived from participant responses that related to Research Question 2.

Table 7

#### *Emergent Theme for Research Question 2 and Frequencies*

#	Emergent themes	Frequency	
		Sources	References
1	Altruism: Personal and professional responsibility toward principal role	3	7

An analysis of the interview data revealed that some principals felt a personal or professional responsibility toward their roles as a school administrator. There was

evidence of a deeply held belief that the role was not just a job, but a responsibility toward students, families, and communities. The following quotes are evidence of the emergent theme of altruism in the form of personal and professional responsibility toward the principal role.

*So, I feel that the principal's job is to give, and some people are going to appreciate that you give, and some people don't, but my job is to continue giving. I feel that if I focus on my job as the giver, then that's where my joy and satisfaction of the job comes from. (SAK10)*

*I care about accountability, meaning I care about achieving what I'm being held accountable for, but that's not the reason I stay in a position. I expect it to be stressful. (SAK10)*

*In that being someone who is in a doctorate program myself, who understands that everything you want to quantify to some degree if it's on a scale, or somehow it wants to be measurable, I understand that we live in a world that almost suggests that things that can't be verified by others don't exist, but my experience has shown me that there are plenty of things that have value that can't be measured ...It sounds corny but I think it's true...Love is one. People can only describe it by poetry. We cannot measure it by any agreed-upon standard; but for many people, it's very real and [is] very [central] that some child, parent, spouse...that they love. No one can tell them it's not real, and so I believe that there is a higher source for all of us that talks to all of us if we be still; and that part is what convinced me to be a principal, even though I had sworn I would never be a principal. I actually said that at one time, "I don't*

want to be a principal. Those people don't care. I want to be a teacher because that's where you help the kids." And then it became clear, "No, you need to be a principal." And that part of me, or us, I feel it knows; but it's not something you can prove to others. I feel there's a part of us that knows, it knows, it knows; but [you] cannot prove it to others. And I personally believe that that's the part that gives me guidance. I think different people give it different names. I'm not really concerned about the name, but I believe it's real for anybody who tries to access [it]. (SAK10)

Now, in terms of my passion and why, nothing's really done that to fuel that. It's almost like it has to become internal...to keep that going. I will say that it pushes me to be a better leader. (MJG9)

I'm like, "I have to win. We have to win. We have to do this!" I mean, if I'm leading, and my job is to work with teachers or students or parents to do that; then if we haven't reached the mark, then it's not over. So, I can't ... That's my own, I guess, drive. I can't walk away until we've accomplished that, and we're not there yet. (MJG9)

Becoming a principal, for me, is a calling. This is my gift; this is something that, you know, others may not talk about; but for me, it's a spiritual walk along with a professional walk. And so, I know that serving in a Title I school for me is my job that God has entrusted me to be the gatekeeper for children who are considered to be at risk. And so, I'm here to protect, I'm here to assist, I'm here

*to support the students that I serve, along with the parents. Sometimes parents need that same support system as well. (MJG9)*

In general, two prominent themes emerged from the data that addressed Research Question 2. Most saliently, respondents expressed a high level of affinity for the children served by their schools and believed that their role as school leader was critical to positive educational and developmental outcomes for their respective student populations. The respondents' feelings of responsibility to the principalship also became apparent as they discussed their own professional development. Some participants seemed to view the principalship as an important factor in their long-term career aspirations.

### **Analysis for Research Question 3**

Unlike the previous two questions, Research Question 3 focused on the relationships between principals of middle schools and stakeholders within their building. Specifically, Research Question 3 asked, "How do principals having two or more years of tenure in a middle school view their relationship with stakeholders in the building—i.e., students, faculty, and staff?" As with the data from the preceding research questions, the researcher condensed and summarized the interview data for Research Question 3 into thematic categories that highlighted the key viewpoints and perspectives of the respondents.

Table 8 provides a summary of the thematic categories generated from responses related to Research Question 3. The data revealed two emergent themes that represent the viewpoints of respondents that related to this research question.

Table 8

*Emergent Themes for Research Question 3 and Frequencies*

#	Emergent themes	Frequency	
		Sources	References
1	Altruism: Concern about school staff demonstrating care for students	6	10
2	Altruism: Developing and growing teachers	4	5

Two major themes emerged from the data that spoke to the relationships between middle school principals and stakeholders within the building. The first theme focused on principals’ displeasure with school staff who did not seem to be fully invested in student success. The second emergent theme was evident in the principals’ report of their willingness to grow and develop teachers within their schools. The examples that follow provide evidence of the principals feelings of altruism, as demonstrated by their concern for their staff’s ability to demonstrate care for the students they serve.

*[The greatest] challenge...I think sometimes...is when you have people...or your faculty and staff, where you...maybe not 100%, but you can see they lost their passion and that it has now just become a job. And to me, that's the biggest challenge on how to motivate individuals who have lost that, but they do not lose the position because retirement is right around the corner. (KCM4)*

*And so motivating them to adjust and stay current and remain relevant to today's student...I think that's one of the biggest challenges—when you see staff or faculty that has lost that passion; and now it's become a job, and their heart really is not in it. (KCM4)*

*They are not always a help to what is needed; and what I mean by that is...again, it goes back to if the idea is to create a culture in which people want to be there, in which people trust and people want to do this work because they genuinely enjoy this work and genuinely continue to want to make a difference in the lives of children, then there should be that person who can act in that capacity...to be a support and a true coach. (MJG9)*

*When I was here as a teacher, we were a school of excellence. When I came back, my expectation was "I can handle any situation, and I can definitely get this school back on track; except that I had about three teachers that were not about students. They had their own adult agendas. And if I said, "Let's try to do this for the children," they would say, "No, that's not how we do it." If I tried to say anything for them to do, they would not do it. So in turn, at the end of the year, I got rid of three teachers, and I hired my new people who shared basically my vision; and the people that remained were completely outnumbered. We were all about being positive, about increasing achievement, about student achievement, about taking care of social-emotional needs of children, etc. (FMK3)*

*So my greatest challenges are teachers that are in it for the check. They lack compassion, they lack care, and they're content knowledge is shaky. That's one of my biggest challenges to either get them to jump on the bandwagon and improve or get out. Getting rid of teachers...you know very well is pretty challenging, because it takes one write up after another, after another, until you can get rid of people; and so that's a big challenge. (FMK3)*

*I think in that aspect of a principal, it's more so just dealing with basic adult management, managing adult[s]...people management...that's having a negative impact on me as a principal; because it's very stressful just dealing with adults' attitudes and behaviors. You have to monitor and ... I hate to say it...I feel like you're monitoring adults, and my goal ... Again, my intention when I took this job, was all of us coming together, "We're going in as adults and support[ing] the kid; we're going to get these kids out of here. They're going to learn;" but then I realized that the adults are the ones that need extra support and love and have issues that ... Bottom line is [that their behaviors and attitudes are] detrimental to [our ability to help] kids get there. It's, to me, is the bottom line is, I hate to say this is ... I tell folks it's not kids that's the issue. It's the adults. (BTH1)*

*My second year, which is last year, my challenge was dealing with, again, adult management. Dealing with...teachers that did not care about the kids, and I kind of let that be a killjoy to my spirit. It made a negative impact on my passion to be the principal, because I really didn't want to deal with the frustration of coming in every day. (BTH1)*

These examples demonstrated the respondents' concern about faculty and staff who did not show appropriate care for their students, which interfered with the principals' ultimate altruistic goal of helping students to succeed. Similarly, the quotes that follow provide evidence of the participants' altruism in the form of their desire to help teachers grow and develop as educators.

*Not just I was supportive of them, but I treated them like their point of view was valid. Like that line in the movie, Avatar, which I don't know if you've seen, but*

*there's this line where there's something that translates to "I see you," which means, "I recognize the real you" ... at least the way I understood it. (SAK10)*

*Well, starting with the challenges, my greatest challenges is with the staff... getting everybody on one accord...on the same page if you will...in educating our youngsters. As I stated before, everybody has different skillsets, and some people have different agendas; however, I truly believe I can work with anyone, but the challenges come for those that don't want to grow. That involves a lot of coaching, a lot of courageous conversations, and additional paperwork that I have to do if I'm reprimanding people for not doing their jobs. (CDT8)*

*I was the administrator for 19 temporaries outside. I really enjoyed that. I really enjoyed being amongst the temporaries and the kids etc. I also really enjoyed being able to grow teachers, increase their capacity; and if I couldn't do it, or it was a subject that I wasn't really familiar with, then I was able to get them the help that they needed. (FMK30)*

*I wanted to be very supportive of teachers. As a teacher, I had a good assistant principal who supported me and guided me and helped me become a great teacher; so I want to do the same with becoming a school administrator. Also, it gives you opportunity to really support students outside the classroom, and I feel like I can make a more positive impact being outside the classroom in that when you support teachers, you support kids. Also, kids should feel welcome and have a positive relationship with authority figures in the building, so that's two of my main reasons for being an administrator. (BTH1)*



While these examples focus on the respondents' interactions and feelings about the faculty and staff at their schools, the most salient theme found in the data related to Research Question 3 focused on the principals' relationship with students. It is also important to note that the participants viewed the parents and families of enrolled students as inextricably related to successful academic outcomes. In effect, the respondents clearly noted that both the students and their parents or other family members were considered building stakeholders. The second most critical theme that emerged related to the role that teachers and other building personnel played in the respondents' decision to remain in their current positions.

#### **Analysis for Research Question 4**

Analyses for the fourth research question follows the same approach used for the previous questions. Like Research Question 3, this query focused on the relationships between middle school principals and stakeholders, yet the emphasis for Research Question 4 was on entities outside of the school building. Specifically, Research Question 4 asked, "How do principals having two or more years of tenure in a middle school view their relationship with stakeholders outside the building—i.e., parents, community leaders, and central administration?" As before, the researcher condensed and summarized the interview data into thematic categories to highlight the key viewpoints and perspectives of the respondents.

As Table 9 demonstrates, two themes emerged from participant responses that spoke to Research Question 4. The first of these two themes involved the participants' view that the district's instructional director was as essential to their success as building leaders. The second theme highlighted the principals' concern for the parents and

families of their student population.

Table 9

*Emergent Themes for Research Question 4 and Frequencies*

#	Emergent themes	Frequency	
		Sources	References
1	Instructional director essential to success	3	4
2	Altruism: Concern for parents and families	10	14

The data revealed that the respondents generally viewed their relationship with outside stakeholders as limited, but positive. Most significantly, they indicated the district’s instructional director as a critical resource for successful leadership and academic success. Some of the other responses were positive, yet most of the participants identified this administrator as important to both their tenure as principal and the success of the middle school. The quotes below provide examples of their opinions about the role that the instructional director (ID) has played in their work.

*I think if the role of the ID changed, I think that would make a difference...They are not always a help to what is needed; and what I mean by that is...again, it goes back to if the idea is to create a culture in which people want to be there, in which people trust, and people want to do this work because they genuinely enjoy this work and genuinely continue to want to make a difference in the lives of children, then there should be that person who can act in that capacity to be a support and a true coach. (MJG9)*

*Currently...and it could be...I mean, I don't know...We had three IDs, but if we look truly at changing that role that they could be that of a coach and not that of*

*"I'm your supervisor so do, do, do, and turn in," that would make a difference. Because sometimes they can buffer all that is coming your way, and sometimes...I guess maybe, I don't know, what's coming down for them, then hits us. So, I don't know what that looks like up there, but if that role...if we talk a little bit more about that role in terms of that relationship, what that looks like, then I think that would help in addition to just considering all things in terms of that accountability piece. So, from the beginning of the school year to the end, we always look at teachers, "Hey, let's balance it out, let's do this." And it's not that. So even taking the time to look at that, would be helpful. (MJG9)*

*We have quite a few opportunities to register for trainings that we can choose from. However, there are also some that are mandatory. So, all of the supports for every expectation is there. Our IDs are trained very well...So, mine, especially for me, has become my primary resource in any kind of support I need. (GMS6)*

*Some of the other ancillary offices I don't know too well, but I don't have to, because my relationship with my ID is so strong. So, pretty much anything that I need that's outside of his realm, he's going to take care of it for me. I don't really have to go to too many people, you know? (GMS6)*

*Like I said, with my new ID that I have [had] for the last...well, she started last year, and this year... I was contemplating resigning and see[ing] if I can go back to being an assistant principal, something of that nature; but her approach...she's been, like I said, very supportive. Again, using the coaching method...coaching strategy of just having an open discussion and ask[ing] you questions like, "What*

*date are you focusing on? How are you going to move the school? How are you going to brand the school? How are you going to meet the district's vision and smart goals for the district for middle schools? How can I support you in anything going on?" And, most important, you can call anytime you want, or you can send her an email. She responds as soon as possible. I think that's been very supportive. (BTH1)*

The next set of participant quotes again demonstrate the principals' feelings of altruism, this time through their concern for parents and families.

*So, I have varying relationships. I mean, I think most of our relationships with students and parents are positive; but even if they weren't, I don't think that would determine whether I did the job. I think it would be whether I thought I was actually helping people, not the relationship itself. (SAK10)*

*I love my school. A lot of it has to do with the students and the parents, because they are [a] very supportive parent community. (KCM4)*

*The support and encouragement... As you know this position is tough because you're dealing with so many aspects...so many components of education. The students and parents...building that rapport with them, having that confidence in me. I'm volunteering, I'm in the school, and just being a motivation, to me, has really kept me here the last four years. (CDT8)*

*So, I believe those relationships with the students and the parents are the two biggest things that really keep you motivated and doing [the work,] because you actually see the fruits of your labor, and you see and hear and talk to the people*

*that benefit from the work that your staff and you are doing at the school.*

(MDG5)

*I've learned the importance of true relationship-building and providing that customer service to parents. I really see how that makes a true difference. So now, when I really understand my parents and students, and can connect more, it gets me excited. Especially when I'm out of the office....I enjoy even when you get the parents that are like, upset and angry, just to bring them down with, "Hey, I understand," or connecting with [them] parent-to-parent, hearing that from my demographic, or my population, when you're able to connect with people that are coming from, their response is very different. Whereas if you stay to one end, and don't meet them where they are, children or parent, it's a clash; and so you don't really feel that you're making a difference. So, this year, the opening has been incredibly different for me than any of my other years, just with that true understanding of connectedness. (MJG9)*

*So, this year, one of my former students—and that will give you just an idea on what relationships we've built with students and parents—called and said, "We have some money that we would like to give to Carnigie Middle School, what would be the things that you would be interested in?" So, we got [a] \$150,000 grant from a foundation who is actually headed by one of my former students. So that relationship....And he, as well as his parents, are the head of philanthropy in that organization. So, we knew not only him, but I knew his parents very well because I taught the child for two years in a row. So, the three of them were*

*sitting on the board, and we got the grant that we got. We really try to establish fantastic relationships with people. (FMK3)*

*I think for the last ... Since I've been here for the past two and just starting my third year, we have seen an increase in enrollment. We're getting a lot of positive feedback from the community. They know their child is safe. I'm also active in the community, so I attend community events; so the parents get to see me outside of the school building. That's been a great factor as well. I think one of my greatest accomplishments is ... again, is bringing a warm ... environment where people feel welcome. When our Spanish-speaking families come in, we have someone at the front desk [who] can greet them in their own language, which helped out a lot; because in my first year, we did not have that. Last year we didn't, because I had to cut a secretary position. This year, I was able to shift a position, so one of my Spanish-speaking paraprofessionals can help out in the main office. She has been able to help [with] registration and [help the] families feel comfortable.*

*(BTH1)*

*We also had a ... We got a brand new parent engagement advocate who's bilingual as well. She does a great job of going out [into] the community, sharing the things that she can help the community with, helping out parents...things like SchoolMax, how to help your child with grades, how to communicate effectively with the teachers and vice versa. She's training our teachers on how to communicate [effectively] with them and respect each other's culture. Just because they're Hispanic, don't mean all of them are Mexican and all of them are El Salvadorian. There are different countries in Central America, so don't lump*

*them all into one country thinking everybody from Central America is El Salvadorian or Mexican. (BTH1)*

*And I think I have a good relationship with my students and my parents overall... that I've built that level of trust with them; and there's something different...when you talk about the urban setting, your character means a lot. It goes far beyond whatever degree you hold. And so, the word gets out that the school, the students, or the parents, they trust you, or they believe in the principal of that building. And so they're willing to give you that chance. And it's a part of the reason why I am here...is because I do love my children that I serve, and I am committed to them making things greater for themselves in life overall. And I don't want to see somebody else come in who doesn't have that same desire and commitment for their success. (MTN7)*

*The parents are good. The parents are good. I mean, you have to ... Again, I think if you approach it from service, and once they know where your heart is...You'll always disagree with some people, but I find them to be mostly very supportive; and those who aren't necessarily supportive, you can't take it personal, because it's not necessarily you sometimes; it's just the situation. And a lot of parents are dealing with a lot of things on their shoulders. And some parents have had good experiences in schools, even as children, as students, and sometimes they bring that into their experience as parents. And so you have to be very aware of that, and not try to take it personal when they do have a difficult day, because nine times out of ten, it's not you. (CWO2)*

## **Impact of Study**

Data show that retention of school principals has been a challenge for many school districts across the United States and for various countries throughout the world (Browne-Ferrigno & Johnson-Fusarelli, 2005; Clark et al., 2009; Partlow & Ridenour, 2008; Stoelinga et al., 2008; Walker & Qian, 2006; Whittal, 2002). As highlighted in the literature review for this study, a wide spectrum of research has provided data on principal turnover and attrition and the negative effects of these transitions on school systems (Branch et al., 2013; Burkhauser et al., 2012; Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller, 2009; Partlow, 2007; Vanderhaar et al., 2006; Weinstein et al., 2009). Among these effects has been the immense financial burden on systems incurred during efforts to recruit and replace these educational professionals (SLN, 2014).

Beyond replacement costs, there remains the compelling reality that school leadership, as represented by a principal, is an important catalyst for the academic success of student populations and the impetus that spurs teacher retention. A lack of continuity in the principalship threatens any progress made in boosting student performance and retaining highly effective teachers. Findings from earlier research on principal retention have pointed to “negative conditions” within the school environment as the cause for high rates of principal turnover. Among these so-called negative conditions are the low socioeconomic status of families served by many schools, the ethnic diversity of the student populations, and high levels of English as a second language (ESL) enrollees within school buildings (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Baker et al., 2010; Beteille et al., 2012; Branch et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2009; Clotfelter et al., 2006; DeAngelis & White, 2011; Fuller & Young, 2009; Gates et al., 2006; Loeb et al., 2010;



Papa, 2007; Ringel et al., 2004) and historically low standardized test scores for particular schools (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Branch et al., 2009; Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller, 2009; Vanderhaar et al., 2006).

An analysis of many of these studies can lead one to infer that apathy—indifference or the lack of feeling and concern ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com), n.d.)—among disadvantaged and minority student populations is a major factor in principals’ decision to leave their schools or school districts (Baker et al., 2010; Beteille et al., 2012; DeAngelis & White, 2011; Fuller et al., 2007; Gates et al., 2006; Loeb et al., 2010). In the case of middle schools, these earlier studies put forth the theory that middle school principals became apathetic about their roles over time and left their positions disillusioned and dissatisfied (Baker et al., 2010; Beteille et al., 2012; DeAngelis & White, 2011; Fuller et al., 2007; Gates et al., 2006; Loeb et al., 2010).

A second theory held that these principals became displeased with compensation and their status, and this displeasure gave way to an “avaricious” quest for new positions with greater rewards—in education or in other fields (Baker et al., 2010; Fraser & Brock 2006; Maforah & Shulze, 2012; Papa Jr., 2007; Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011). Several researchers sought to explore these prevailing theories with a sample of non-mainstream, middle school principals who worked with diverse populations of children. In contrast, a driving premise for the present study was that limited empirical information existed about the unique sociocultural, pedagogical, and personal factors that influence middle school principals’ decisions to remain in their positions or to seek other professional opportunities. Findings from the data gathered for this study suggest that a different

retention paradigm may exist for principals of color working in middle schools that serve ethnically diverse student populations.

**Emergent theory of retention.** A major finding from the analysis of interview data revealed that principals in the sample were highly motivated to remain in their current positions for several years. Most of the participants interviewed expressed that their leadership role was more than a source of income; it was a means through which they could achieve their “mission” to improve academic outcomes for poor and minority children and to fulfill the needs of families in the communities that they served. The rewards of the principalship for many of the respondents moved beyond the notion of professional aggrandizement to the realm of philosophical imperative, as most participants expressed a deep commitment to their professional roles that stemmed from inherent values and principles. As one respondent stated, “*Being a school principal is a calling...a way of giving back to the community.*” This type of commitment to the principalship, particularly for a middle school administrator, contrasts sharply with conventional theory on principal retention.

Past research in this area primarily centered on understanding the reasons for high attrition rates among principals nationwide. The literature was replete with empirical evidence that principals remained in their positions for only a few years before moving on to other professional endeavors. Acknowledging that the findings from the present study are based on a small sample of experienced school principals in one school district in the Mid-Atlantic regions, what emerged from the data was a new paradigm that countered existing thought on the factors that influence a principal’s decision to remain at one school for more than two years. In fact, many subjects in this research sample

expressed a desire to remain in their current position as middle school principal for several additional years, with one even “*planning to remain until retirement.*” A clear sense of altruism emerged from these data, which contrasts with previous research and gives credence to the paradigm displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2 depicts three primary imperatives that can undergird an individual’s decision to remain as school principal or to leave the position. The desire for enhanced income opportunities or new positions with greater prestige speak to the *avarice* imperative. Professionals adhering to this imperative might seek higher-level positions within a school district, and may aspire to become a superintendent. Others might seek employment in private industry, parlaying their administrative experience into lucrative career opportunities in corporate management. A second type of influence on a professional’s decision to leave a principalship might result from feelings of futility or frustration associated with the school setting. Student performance might be low, the sociocultural mixture of families served by the school might differ from that of the principal, or the demand of the position might prove overwhelming. These influences align with the *apathy* imperative.

The third imperative *altruism*, characterizes an individual’s unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others (www.merriam-webster.com, n.d.). This imperative was demonstrated consistently by the subjects in this research study. These principals expressed strong commitments to their schools’ community and families and to the well-being of their students. They each made the decision to stay in the principalship counter to national, state, and local trends, all while facing workplace challenges (i.e. disproportionately large minority student population, low socioeconomic status of the

student populations, low student achievement, high teacher turnover, and lack of consistent parental support) that have been amongst the stated reasons for the departure of many principals nationwide.

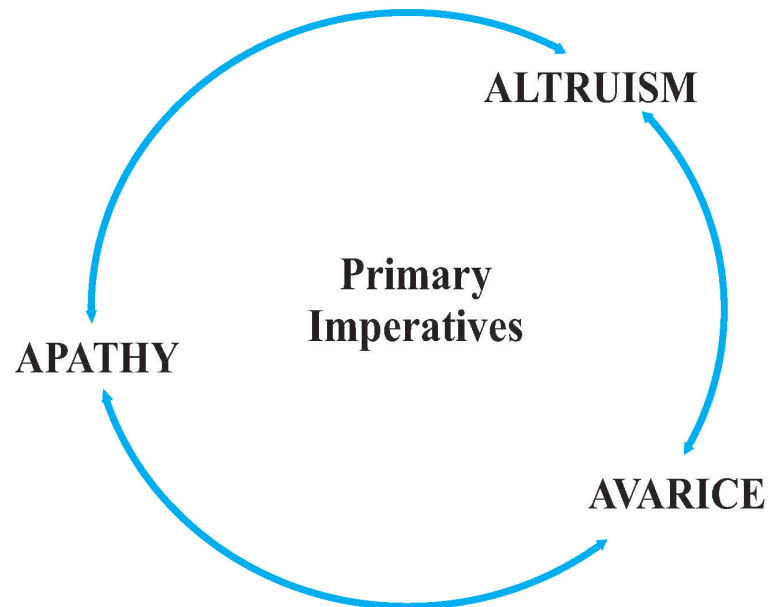


Figure 2. Schematic Representation of Primary Imperatives that Influence Professional Behaviors and Decision-Making

Previous research has found that the altruism construct is particularly salient among African American and other minority (non-white) principals serving in urban communities (Tekleselassie & Villarreal 2011). Tekleselassie and Villarreal also noted the following:

[Urban] school principals may be less likely to switch their current school because of their desire to make a difference by leading schools that are most in need. In other words, urban principals may find a strong, compelling reason to provide service to the disproportionately minority and poor students attending urban schools. (p. 278)

Professional who express a willingness to remain in their current positions as

school principal of challenging schools for several years are rarely, if ever, discussed in the literature on career choice and school administration. Such principals might be viewed as proverbial “*unicorns in the heard of horses,*” because prevailing theories and findings of retention studies conducted on school administrators have asserted that they simply do not exist.

It is useful to borrow from concepts of behavioral measurement to understand this emergent theory and its conflict with existing modes of thought. The Platonic theory of measurement postulates that an abstraction may not have been observed in the real world, but that does not negate its existence. If it can be conceptualized, then it does exist, in accordance with Plato’s theory of truth (Carnap, 1962; Loevinger, 1957; Lord & Novicks, 1968). Therefore, the *altruistic principal* is a reality in certain school settings.

### **Recommendations for School Districts**

This study has highlighted the importance of altruism in educational settings where student populations display greater academic needs than might be present in other locations with higher measured outcomes. The question for school district administrators becomes how to find and position educational professionals in leadership roles where their altruistic behaviors might improve performance outcomes for needful students. One possible method might be to add recruitment criteria for school principals that focus on attitudes and penchants that appear linked to altruistic behaviors. Districts could employ psychological scales and various behavioral instruments during the recruitment process to identify desirable personality qualities. Those candidates in possession of such qualities might receive higher preference for placement in school buildings where their skills and temperaments are most suitable.

Another recommendation is for school district administrators to implement professional development activities structured to enhance altruistic behaviors. Although altruism is inherent and cannot be taught, it is possible to enhance such a resident personality trait within persons through meaningful psychosocial skills development. Districts could contract with consultants who possess training in behavioral sciences disciplines to help with the implementation of professional development programs for principals that focus on fostering altruism and related psychosocial behaviors.

Over the past few years, the NDPSD has taken many positive steps over the toward establishing a credible principal pipeline for individuals aspiring to become principals. As such, it seems prudent for central administration to offer stronger support for individuals at the beginning of their principalship tenure to spur future retention. This support should be field based rather than centralized. Consider that most subjects within this research identified a field-based representative of central administration, the instructional director (ID), as their chief source of professional support. Some respondents considered this ID a professional mentor and the ostensible reason for their ultimate success in the middle school setting. Such a support mechanism should be retained, expanded, and enhanced. For example, school districts, including the one from which the current sample was selected, should ensure that new principals are immediately assigned to a well-experienced ID or other senior administrator to guide the new principal's growth process.

Linkages should be made clear between the school principal, the ID, and executive-level central administrators regarding the continuity of district policies and initiatives. Further, regular formal and informal visits to schools should be made by

executive administrators and other personnel from central administration. Such visits would allow school principals to feel somewhat less isolated from the decision-making process of central administration and the school board. Additionally, these visits would enable personnel from central administration to develop a better understanding of the complexity of day-to-day operations within the school settings. Anecdotally, one subject in this study stated that “*senior administrators only appear at the schools for punitive purposes.*” On the contrary, administrative visits should occur more regularly to support a principal rather than to mete out punishment.

While principals included in this study did not comment on or complain about their salaries, compensation packages for middle school and other principals in NDPSD should be commensurate with those offered by nearby school districts in the region. Given the commitment of highly-skilled professions leading the schools in NDPSD, it would be ideal to reduce the need for principals to even consider seeking higher salaries from surrounding districts. In addition, districts should be more intentional about sharing successes and best practices. Stories of school successes and strong leadership are certain to stimulate the interest of recruiters from nearby districts resulting in offers of stronger compensation packages that might prove alluring, even to those principals with high levels of commitment to their current positions. Providing comparable compensation would clearly enhance principal retention rates, particularly for middle school leaders.

### **Recommendations for Future Principal Retention Studies**

For certain, the methods and procedures of this current research should be replicated in other school districts. It would be useful for researchers to select samples from school districts with demographic patterns similar to and different from a large

urban school district used in this research. While the race or ethnicity of the principals was not the primary focus of this study, most of the participants were African American principals. Thus, future studies should also involve persons of color. In addition, it is important to ensure that middle school principals included in a replicated study have the same ethnic backgrounds as the children and families served by the middle school.

The specific design used in this research could be replicated with principals heading elementary schools and high schools, as well. Findings from such studies could bring greater clarity to the unique issues of principal retention when younger or older students are enrolled in school represented by sampled professionals. These types of replications could offer greater insight into key factors influencing decisions by principals to remain in their current positions for several years.

Future inquiries might also involve the use of survey instruments with larger sample sizes than were possible with this study. Researchers might also use the themes that emerged from this investigation, and structure items to gather rating scale data, to conduct further examinations of the *primary imperative* paradigm that emerged from this study. These explorations might also include the viewpoints and attitudes of other school leaders, including assistant principals and other building-level administrators.

Future studies should also give careful attention to gathering demographic and experiential information about the research subjects. With background variables included in resulting data sets, researchers could perform comparative analyses on response data to identify any differences that might exist between subgroups based upon the participants' specific administrative roles. The focus could be on retention matters facing middle



school administrators or a broader group of professionals holding administrative positions in elementary schools and high schools.

The need for comparative data became apparent when the researcher noticed certain response patterns in the current study. Although the research questions were not focused on subgroup comparisons, there were a few differences noticed between female and male interviewees. When responding to interview items pertaining to the complexity requirements for a principalship, the female subjects seemed more willing to embrace the intense and varied demands of the position. In contrast, the male subjects described the complexity of position demands to be off-putting and somewhat “*discouraging*.” Given this anecdotal observation, future studies should include a specific comparison by gender group on key research variables.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: University of Maryland IRB Approval Letter



UNIVERSITY OF  
MARYLAND

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

1204 Marie Mount Hall  
College Park, MD 20742-5125  
TEL 301.405.4212  
FAX 301.314.1475  
irb@umd.edu  
www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB

DATE: June 12, 2017

TO: Barry Cyrus  
FROM: University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1056658-1] A qualitative analysis of Middle School Principal Retention in Urban school districts

REFERENCE #:  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: June 12, 2017  
EXPIRATION DATE: June 11, 2018  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Prior to submission to the IRB Office, this project received scientific review from the departmental IRB Liaison.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of June 11, 2018.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Unless a consent waiver or alteration has been approved, Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

## **Appendix A: University of Maryland IRB Approval Letter cont.**

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of seven years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or [irb@umd.edu](mailto:irb@umd.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB's records.

## Appendix B: PGCPS IRB Approval Letter



Kola K. Sunmonu, Ph.D.  
Director of Research & Evaluation

September 5, 2017

Mr. Barry S. Cyrus  
601 Shelfar Place  
Fort Washington, MD 20744

Dear Mr. Cyrus:

The review of your request to conduct the research entitled "*A Qualitative Analysis Of Middle School Principal Retention In Urban School Districts*" in Prince George's County Public School has been completed. Based on the examination, I am pleased to inform you that the Department of Testing, Research & Evaluation has granted conditional authorization for you to proceed with your study.

Authorization for this research extends through the 2017-2018 school year only. If you are not able to complete your data collection during this period, you must submit a written request for an extension. We reserve the right to withdraw approval at any time or decline to extend the approval if the implementation of your study adversely impacts any of the school district's activities. It is important that the procedure detailed in your proposal and related documents submitted be followed while conducting your study. Should you change the procedure, the revised procedure must be approved by this office before being implemented.

An abstract and one copy of the final report should be forwarded to the Department of Testing, Research & Evaluation within one month of successful defense of your dissertation. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached at 301-780-6807 or by email, [kolawole.sunmonu@pgcps.org](mailto:kolawole.sunmonu@pgcps.org). I wish you success in your study.

Sincerely,



Kola K. Sunmonu, Ph.D.  
Director of Research & Evaluation

KKS:kks

## Appendix C: Consent Form

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>A Qualitative Analysis of Middle School Principal Retention in Urban School Districts</b>
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	<p>This research is being conducted by Barry S. Cyrus a graduate student under the supervision of Dr. David Imig at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a middle school principal in the Prince George’s County Public school (PGCPS) district and have served at the same school for two or more consecutive years. The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences and factors, both institutional and personal, that influence PGCPS middle school principals’ decision to remain in the same position for two or more years. The following three research questions, adapted from Luebke’s (2013) qualitative study of 10 high school principals in Wisconsin, will guide this study. Dr. Luebke provided written permission allowing the researcher to adapt and utilize these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What institutional factors influence middle school principals’ decision to remain at the same school for two or more years?</li> <li>b) What personal characteristics are common in middle school principals with two or more years of tenure in their positions?</li> <li>c) How do middle school principals with two or more years of tenure in their positions view their relationships with staff, parents, students, the district office, the community, other administrators, and the school board?</li> </ul>
<b>Procedures</b>	<p>First, you will be asked to complete a demographic data sheet. The data sheet will request information such as your age, gender, certification, degrees earned, etc. Next, you will participate in 60-90-minute face-to-face interview in a location that is convenient for you. The interview will consist of questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What were some of your expectations when you became a principal? Did the experience meet your expectations? Please explain.</li> <li>2. How does the school district generally support your growth as a principal?</li> <li>3. Let’s talk a little bit about your relationships with others in your school community. How does your relationship with students and parents influence your decision to remain in this position?</li> </ul> <p>The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice-recording device and will be uploaded upon completion for transcription by Verbalink Transcription Services.</p>
<b>Potential Risks and Discomforts</b>	<p>There are some inherent risks for the you in this research study. Speaking about the challenges they have faced with one or more of their colleagues could lead to some discomfort and may potentially cause some individuals have concerns regarding their anonymity and privacy of the information they share. To prevent a breach in confidentiality, the researcher will be the sole proprietor of all collected data. The data will always be kept in a secure location in the researcher’s home. The researcher has 14 years of experience as a school administrator. We are prepared to excuse you from the interview at any point if you do not wish to continue.</p>
<b>Potential Benefits</b>	<p>There are no direct benefits to you in this research study. However, this study will provide an opportunity for you to think through your experiences and identify ways that you have received adequate support or areas in which the district could provide additional support. It could also help you identify (maybe for the first time, consciously) the factors that have influenced your decision to remain in their position and the factors that sometimes make it difficult to stay. In addition, we hope that in the future, other people might benefit from this study and gain an</p>

	<p>understanding of the factors that influence middle school principals choose to remain in their positions extended periods that exceed the national average for principal tenure.</p>
<b>Confidentiality</b>	<p>Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by utilizing extremely thorough safeguards to protect the identities and maintain the anonymity of all the participants. The researcher will assign an individual pseudonym to each you and will change your school's name. To the greatest extent plausible, school demographic information will be explained in terms that do not identify any specific school and the school district will be referred to as the "Northern Dancer Public School District." Finally, your answers will be confidential and no one will know how you answered any of the questions.</p> <p>To keep this information safe, a copy of your responses will be stored securely on a password-protected computer. Additionally, your real name will not be used in any written copy of the discussion. The data will be destroyed after three years. All interview notes and transcripts will be kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file throughout the research process. After this study has been completed, all the audiotapes and transcripts will be retained in a secure location for three years, per university guidelines, after which time, they will be destroyed.</p> <p>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger, or if we are required to do so by law.</p>
<b>Compensation</b>	<p>Upon completion of each of the scheduled interviews, you will receive a \$25.00 gift card.</p>
<b>Right to Withdraw and Questions</b>	<p>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 or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study; if you have questions, concerns, or complaints; or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the principal investigator:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Barry S. Cyrus</b>  <b>601 Shelfar Place</b>  <b>Fort Washington, Maryland 20744</b></p> <p>Or</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Dr. David Imig</b>  <b>2334 Benjamin Building</b>  <b>University of Maryland</b>  <b>College Park, Maryland 20420</b></p>
<b>Participant Rights</b>	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p>

	<b>University of Maryland College Park          Institutional Review Board Office          1204 Marie Mount Hall          College Park, Maryland, 20742          E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a>          Telephone: 301-405-0678</b>	
	This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.	
<b>Statement of Consent</b>	<i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i>  <i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i>	
<b>Signature and Date</b>	<b>NAME OF PARTICIPANT</b> [Please Print]	
	<b>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</b>	
	<b>DATE</b>	

## Appendix D: Demographic Data Sheet

**Background Questionnaire**

ID#

● **Credentials:** Please indicate the degrees and certificates you have earned by checking the appropriate boxes to denote degree type and program type, using this key:

- Alt = alternative certification
- DE = distance education program where 50% of course work is completed online
- TUB = traditional university program with 50% or more in-person instruction

<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's Degree <table style="display: inline-table; border-collapse: collapse; margin-left: 10px;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 15px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="font-size: 8px; text-align: center;">Alt</td> <td style="font-size: 8px; text-align: center;">DE</td> <td style="font-size: 8px; text-align: center;">TUB</td> </tr> </table>				Alt	DE	TUB	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Certificate <table style="display: inline-table; border-collapse: collapse; margin-left: 10px;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 15px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="font-size: 8px; text-align: center;">Alt</td> <td style="font-size: 8px; text-align: center;">DE</td> <td style="font-size: 8px; text-align: center;">TUB</td> </tr> </table>				Alt	DE	TUB
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● **Teaching Experience:** For each position held, please indicate the years of experience, grade level taught, and the subject area. Use the fields below:

Example~ 12 Years Grade Level: 4th Subject: Language Arts

<input type="text"/>	Years	Grade Level _____	Subject _____
<input type="text"/>	Years	Grade Level _____	Subject _____
<input type="text"/>	Years	Grade Level _____	Subject _____
<input type="text"/>	Years	Grade Level _____	Subject _____

Area(s) of teaching certification: \_\_\_\_\_ *(please print)*

● **Administrative Experience:** For each position held, write in the years of experience and check building level of position, using this key:

- ES = Elementary School
- MS = Middle School
- HS = High School

	Assistant Principal:	Principal:																																																												
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Do you have a Middle School Principal certificate?  yes  no

● **Other Information:**

Do you reside in the district? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	Gender? <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male
Age? <input type="checkbox"/> Under 30 <input type="checkbox"/> 30-39 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-49 <input type="checkbox"/> 50-59 <input type="checkbox"/> 60 or above	Current Salary? <input type="checkbox"/> \$90-99K <input type="checkbox"/> \$100-109K <input type="checkbox"/> \$110-119K <input type="checkbox"/> \$120-129K <input type="checkbox"/> \$130-139K <input type="checkbox"/> \$140-149K <input type="checkbox"/> \$150K or above

Ver 1.0: 7/17



## Appendix E: Principal Recruitment Letter

Barry S. Cyrus  
601 Shelfar Place  
Fort Washington, Maryland 20744

Dear (Middle School Principal):

My name is Barry S. Cyrus and I am a doctoral student at the University of Maryland at College Park in the field of School System Leadership. In my dissertation, I plan to examine the longevity principals in an era of rapid and intense change for schools, specifically for middle school principals who have served in their present position for two or more years. Through my study I hope to identify institutional and personal factors that influence middle school principals to remain in challenging positions for longer periods of time. The information from this study can be useful to school districts and institutions of higher education as they continue to identify ways to support middle school principals in their work.

My initial examination of data about middle school principals in the Washington, DC metropolitan area led me to identify you as a principal who has served in your present position for at least two years. I am requesting your participation in this study. Your participation in the study would consist of one one-to-one interview. Each interview will last from sixty to ninety minutes. The time and place of the interview will be scheduled at your convenience within the next two weeks. The interviews will be audio-taped and professionally transcribed by a confidential transcription service, and you will have the opportunity to review the interview transcript to ensure that it clearly and accurately represents your views. Neither your name nor the name of your school or school district will be used in the study. All interview responses will remain confidential. You may withdraw from the study at any time during the process.

I will contact you within the next week to answer any questions you may have about the study, provide any additional information that you may need, and hopefully arrange a date and time for an interview. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study. Through this work we will expand the literature on principal retention in middle schools. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information. You may also contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. David Imig, at (301) 910-5306 or by email at [dimig@umd.edu](mailto:dimig@umd.edu) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Barry S. Cyrus  
University of Maryland College Park Graduate Student

## Appendix F: Principal Recruitment Email

Dear (Middle School Principal):

My name is Barry S. Cyrus and I am a doctoral student at the University of Maryland at College Park in the field of School System Leadership. In my dissertation, I plan to examine the longevity principals in an era of rapid and intense change for schools, specifically for middle school principals who have served in their present position for two or more years. Through my study I hope to identify institutional and personal factors that influence middle school principals to remain in challenging positions for longer periods of time. The information from this study can be useful to school districts and institutions of higher education as they continue to identify ways to support middle school principals in their work.

My initial examination of data about middle school principals in the Washington, DC metropolitan area led me to identify you as a principal who has served in your present position for at least two years. I am requesting your participation in this study. Your participation in the study would consist of one one-to-one interview. **Each interview will last from sixty to ninety minutes. The time and place of the interview will be scheduled at your convenience within the next two weeks.** The interviews will be audio-taped and professionally transcribed by a confidential transcription service, and you will have the opportunity to review the interview transcript to ensure that it clearly and accurately represents your views. **Neither your name nor the name of your school or school district will be used in the study. All interview responses will remain confidential. You may withdraw from the study at any time during the process.**

I will contact you within the next week to answer any questions you may have about the study, provide any additional information that you may need, and hopefully arrange a date and time for an interview. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study. Through this work we will expand the literature on principal retention in middle schools. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information. You may also contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. David Imig, at (301) 910-5306 or by email at [dimig@umd.edu](mailto:dimig@umd.edu) if you have any questions or concerns. Please reply to this email by regarding your willingness to participate in this research study.

Sincerely,

Barry S. Cyrus

## Appendix G: Interview Protocol

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### Opening Statement:

*This study is designed to explore factors that influence the decisions of middle school principals to remain in their current positions, particularly during these times when district, state, and federal leaders are increasing expectations and pushing for changes in educational delivery systems.*

*During this interview, I would like to hear your insights and perspectives on a set of queries about the education process.*

#### Queries:

1. *Let's start with some general information... (1a.) Why did you decide to become a school administrator? (1b.) What were some of your expectations upon becoming a principal and were these expectation met?*
2. *Focusing a bit on central administration... (2a.) How has the district's expectations of you as a principal changed during your tenure in this position? (2b.) How does the district support your ability to meet expectations and to grow as an administrator?*
3. *Let's talk about your relationship with others in the school community... (3a.) How does your relationship with students and parents influence your decision to remain in this position? (3b.) How does your relationship with central administration, the board, and other administrators influence your decision to remain in this position?*
4. *Moving on... (4a.) Tell me about your greatest challenges in this position. (4b.) Tell me about your greatest accomplishments in this position.*
5. *Now, I am going to identify some factors associated with school leadership. For each factor, please give a brief explanation about the role it plays in your decision to remain in this position...*
  - (5a.) Student achievement;
  - (5b.) Socioeconomic makeup of the student population;
  - (5c.) Racial/ethnic makeup of the student population;
  - (5d.) Accountability [e.g., local, state, federal];
  - (5e.) Complexity of the position;
  - (5f.) Compensation;
  - (5g.) Time requirements.

## Appendix G: Interview Protocol cont.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL–Page 2

6. *There are just a few more items to go over...* On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being “*not at all satisfied*” and 10 being “*extremely satisfied*,” how do you rate your satisfaction with this position as principal?
7. *A bit more regarding this position...* **(7a.)** What are your long-term professional goals? **(7b.)** Does this current position play a role in achieving your long-term goals? **(7c.)** How long do you plan to remain as principal of this middle school?
8. *Finally...* Are there any other factors that have not been mentioned which might influence your decision to remain in this position?

*I wish to thank you for your time and meaningful ideas about this important topic regarding the education of*

## Appendix H: Permission to Use Interview Protocol

# Research Questions and Research Instrument/Survey Questions

Inbox x

barry cyrus

Jan  
17

to patricia.luebke

Dear Dr. Luebke,

My name is Barry Cyrus and I am a doctoral student at the University of Maryland at College Park. I was a middle school principal for nine years and I am currently a third-grade teacher in Washington, DC. We spoke by phone in June 2016 regarding the use of your research questions and research instruments (interview questions). I am writing to formally request permission to utilize your documents in my research.

Like you, I plan to conduct a qualitative research study on the personal institutional factors that influence principal to remain in their positions for long periods of time. However, my research will focus solely on middle school principals serving in urban districts. I have chosen on middle school principals because there is very little research that focuses specifically principals on that level. Also, middle school is unique merely because of the challenges it presents. These challenges include the incomparable nature of middle grade students and the demands their developmental needs places on teachers - and subsequently principals. In addition, middle school plays a vital role in a students' future success, particularly at such a vulnerable period in their lives.

I anticipate beginning my study this spring of 2017. Please let me know if I have your permission to use your documents in my research and if there are any fees for reproducing and/or adapting your work in this manner.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours truly,

Barry S. Cyrus

## Appendix H: Permission to Use Interview Protocol cont.

**Patricia Luebke**

Jan  
22

to me

Hello Barry

Please accept my apology for not getting back to you earlier. I was booked in meetings much of this week. Please feel free to use my interview protocol and questions in your research. I look forward to seeing your results.

Best to you as you proceed with your study.

Pat

Patricia A. Luebke, PhD  
Dean, School of Education  
Special Education Program Director  
Assistant Professor

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From: barry cyrus  
Sent: Tuesday, January 17, 2017 8:05 PM  
To: Patricia Luebke  
Cc: barry cyrus  
Subject: Research Questions and Research Instrument/Survey Questions

---

**barry cyrus**

Jan  
23

to Patricia

Dr. Luebke,

Thank you very much for giving me permission to use your research questions and your research instrument. I will make sure that the information is properly cited in my research.  
Cheers

## Appendix I: Permission to Use Demographic Data Sheet

### Demographic Data Sheet

Inbox x

**barry cyrus**

Apr 30 (13 days ago)

to khickman

Dear Dr. Hickman,

My name is Barry Cyrus and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland at College Park. I was a middle school principal for nine years and I am currently a third-grade teacher in Washington, DC. We spoke by phone April 28, 2017 regarding the use of your Demographic Data Sheet from your dissertation. I am writing to formally request permission to utilize your documents in my research.

I plan to conduct a qualitative research study on the personal institutional factors that influence middle school principals to remain in their positions and school for long periods of time. I have chosen to focus on middle school principals because there is very little research that focuses specifically principals on that level.

Also, middle school is unique merely because of the challenges it presents. These challenges include the incomparable nature of middle grade students and the demands their developmental needs places on teachers - and subsequently principals. In addition, middle school plays a vital role in a students' future success, particularly at such a vulnerable period in their lives.

I anticipate beginning my study this spring of 2017. Please let me know if I have your permission to use your documents in my research and if there are any fees for reproducing and/or adapting your work in this manner.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours truly,

Barry S. Cyrus

Neval Thomas Elementary School

650 Anacostia Avenue NE

Washington, DC 20019

**Karen Hickman**

May 1 (12 days ago)

to me

Barry,

You have my permission to utilize the information in my dissertation to assist you with your work. This will be free of charge. Best wishes to you and your work!

Dr. Karen Hickman

## Appendix I: Permission to Use Demographic Data Sheet cont.

**From:** barry cyrus  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 30, 2017 2:52 PM  
**To:** Karen Hickman  
**Cc:** barry cyrus  
**Subject:** Demographic Data Sheet

This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error please notify the system manager. Please note that any views or opinions presented in this email are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Pasadena I.S.D. Finally, the recipient should check this email and any attachments for the presence of viruses. The company accepts no liability for any damage caused by any virus transmitted by this email.

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**barry cyrus**

May 1 (12 days ago)

to Karen

Dr. Hickmann,  
Thank you for granting me permission to use the demographic data sheet. I will make sure that the information is properly cited in my research.  
Cheers

**Karen Hickman**

May 1 (12 days ago)

to me

Thank you.



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