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This qualitative research study examined the perceptions of current and/or former assistant principals, principals and district leaders as to why certain assistant principals who aim or had aimed to become K-12 public school principals have been unable to achieve the goal of attaining the principalship. Educators who choose to pursue K-12 public school administrative positions often envision themselves becoming principals. However, there are some individuals who have been unable to achieve that goal. This study investigated perceived obstacles to promotion from the assistant principalship to the principalship. The study examined the shared experiences of assistant principals to determine if exposure and experience with certain types of activities and responsibilities better prepare assistant principals for the principalship. The study also explored the concept of being stuck in the role of assistant principal.

The findings of the research support that being stuck as an assistant principal is largely a self-imposed barrier, in which assistant principals have found themselves stuck due to their own actions. These actions suggest and include damaged relationships with the principal (which could be caused by actions of the AP and/or the principal); poor decision making; patterns of mistakes made; assistant principals failing to seek additional experiences and opportunities. Although there were two study participants who felt stuck in the role of AP as a result of race and/or gender bias, these two individuals did achieve promotion to the district level, bypassing the principalship. Stuckness is hard to admit;

however, the ability to become unstuck is dependent on the individual assistant principal seeking avenues for feedback and forgiveness if they have been involved in previous incidents or mistakes. In addition, school districts bare responsibility for creating opportunities for assistant principal growth and development through mentoring programs, professional development and a willingness to provide authentic feedback and support to assistant principals who seek help in getting unstuck.

PERCEIVED BARRIERS LIMITING ASCENSION TO THE PRINCIPALSHIP:
IDENTIFYING PERCEPTIONS OF ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS,
PRINCIPALS, AND DISTRICT SUPERVISORS

by

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I dedicate this to my parents and grandparents.
Grandpa Perkins always said I would eventually be a doctor!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of current and/or former assistant principals, principals and district leaders as to why certain assistant principals who aim or had aimed to become K-12 public school principals have been unable to achieve the goal of attaining to the principalship. In other words, this study examined the phenomenon of being “stuck” as an assistant principal.

Educators who choose to pursue K-12 public school administrative positions often envision themselves becoming principals. However, there are some individuals who have been unable to achieve that goal. In my professional role in district leadership, I have worked with several assistant principals who have been stuck in the position of assistant principal for years. These APs had hoped to become a principal, but they were never given that opportunity. Over the years, these APs were labeled as being a career AP, in that it was known they would never become a principal in our district. These hard working APs had become stuck. My research was designed to investigate the problem of being stuck, as well as identify ways APs might be able to get unstuck. The extant literature has little to say about assistant principals in general and virtually nothing to say about the phenomenon of being stuck. To address this gap in the literature, this study

investigated perceived obstacles to promotion from the assistant principalship to the principalship.

Overview of the Study

To investigate the phenomenon of being stuck—specifically how assistant principals get stuck and what they can do to get unstuck, I collected individual interviews with 9 assistant principals to help determine what factors assistant principals feel limit their opportunities of becoming a K-12 public school principal. Additional inquiry investigated the beliefs of eight current school district leaders regarding the reasons that have limited assistant principals' attaining the principalship.

I included in this study assistant principals who have remained assistant principals for three or more years without promotion to the principalship and who also remained assistant principals throughout the time frame. Nine assistant principal participants were selected from the Piedmont Region 5 area with a mix of individuals from all grade levels and various school settings (elementary, middle and high schools). One assistant principal was promoted to principal during the course of this research.

This qualitative study examined assistant principals' perspectives and heard their stories and their thoughts as to why promotions never materialized. Selected assistant principals for this study included both current and former assistant principals who have not or were not promoted to the principalship, including two directors who served as assistant principals, but never received promotions to the principalship.

Significance of the Study

The topic of assistant principals and their leadership development is of great interest to me for two reasons. First, I have personally witnessed and worked with quality assistant principals who were committed and dedicated to their jobs but were not able to advance to the principalship. Secondly, in my role as Assistant Superintendent, I facilitate leadership academies that are designed to develop future teacher and school administrative leaders.

This study will help me—and others in roles similar to mine—to identify focus areas for development of future leaders within our districts. Professionally, this research will help others reflect and develop programs designed to foster the needed leadership characteristics and roles that will help assistant principals transition successfully into the role of principal. This research will help fill in certain gaps in research. Much research focuses on principal leadership; however, there is a need specifically for research that examines assistant principals and their needs.

Additionally, there is a need for professional resources and tools that are oriented toward the work of assistant principals. The standards that are used to evaluate assistant principals are not a good fit for the work they typically do. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction produced the North Carolina Standards for School Executives for principals and assistant principals. These standards serve as the basis of the evaluation instrument for both principals and assistant principals. There are eight standards which are used to evaluate principals and assistant principals: strategic leadership; instructional leadership; cultural leadership; human resource leadership;

managerial leadership; external development leadership; micro-political leadership; and academic achievement leadership (which measures student growth data on standardized tests). However, in reviewing the standards (both from a personal experience having these standards serve as my former evaluation standards and now as an evaluator of principals) the standards are aligned with the job responsibilities of principals and not the assistant principal. Reviewing the historical roles and duties of assistant principals clearly shows this trend. Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) conducted a literature review on the topic of assistant principal development. Within this study they cite a 2006 study from Marshall and Hooley that examined the span of duties for assistant principals. The study produced 4 major duties: conferring with students and their parents; disciplinary issues; scheduling, attendance and registering students; and counseling. These findings support the typical managerial role of assistant principals. As Good (2008) states, “How can assistant principals, who already fill their days with the three B’s—books, behinds, and buses—find time to become better instructional leaders?” (p. 46).

Thus, assistant principals are generally overlooked in research on educational leadership and are also overlooked in professional resources/standards. As such, more attention needs to be paid to assistant principals and especially to what it is that keeps those who want to attain a principalship from being able to do so. In addition, a study by Oleszewski et al. (2012) found that assistant principals did not feel prepared to assume a principal role. Having experienced the position of assistant principal, I would agree that my responsibilities as an assistant principal did not prepare me for the principalship. I

learned more from watching the mistakes of principals than from any preparation or responsibilities. As school districts seek qualified candidates for principalships, it is important to consider that the role and experiences of the assistant principal are often very different from the role and expectations of a principal. If we do not prepare current assistant principals for the principalship, leadership challenges will continue, and school districts will not be prepared for the increased challenges that are facing public school education.

Through my research study, I hoped to identify obstacles to attaining the principalship and find possible solutions to overcoming perceived obstacles to the principalship. Understanding these perceived obstacles can assist districts in better preparing assistant principals for the role of principal. Figure 1 illustrates my original concept map for this study. A variety of perceptions may exist among assistant principals, principals and district level leaders regarding specific factors that may limit assistant principals from obtaining the principalship. These factors could contribute to assistant principals getting stuck in the role. This study will seek to examine stuckness by asking those who are closest to the work—current assistant principals and the principals and district level leaders who supervise and evaluate assistant principals daily. This inquiry could potentially assist local school districts in identifying effective strategies to implement into their leadership development programs that ensure assistant principals are receiving the necessary training and support to further their personal leadership development. In addition, this study could assist school leader preparation programs at colleges and universities to incorporate findings into their programs to

address perceived needs of district officials to ensure assistant principals are qualified and ready to assume school leadership positions.

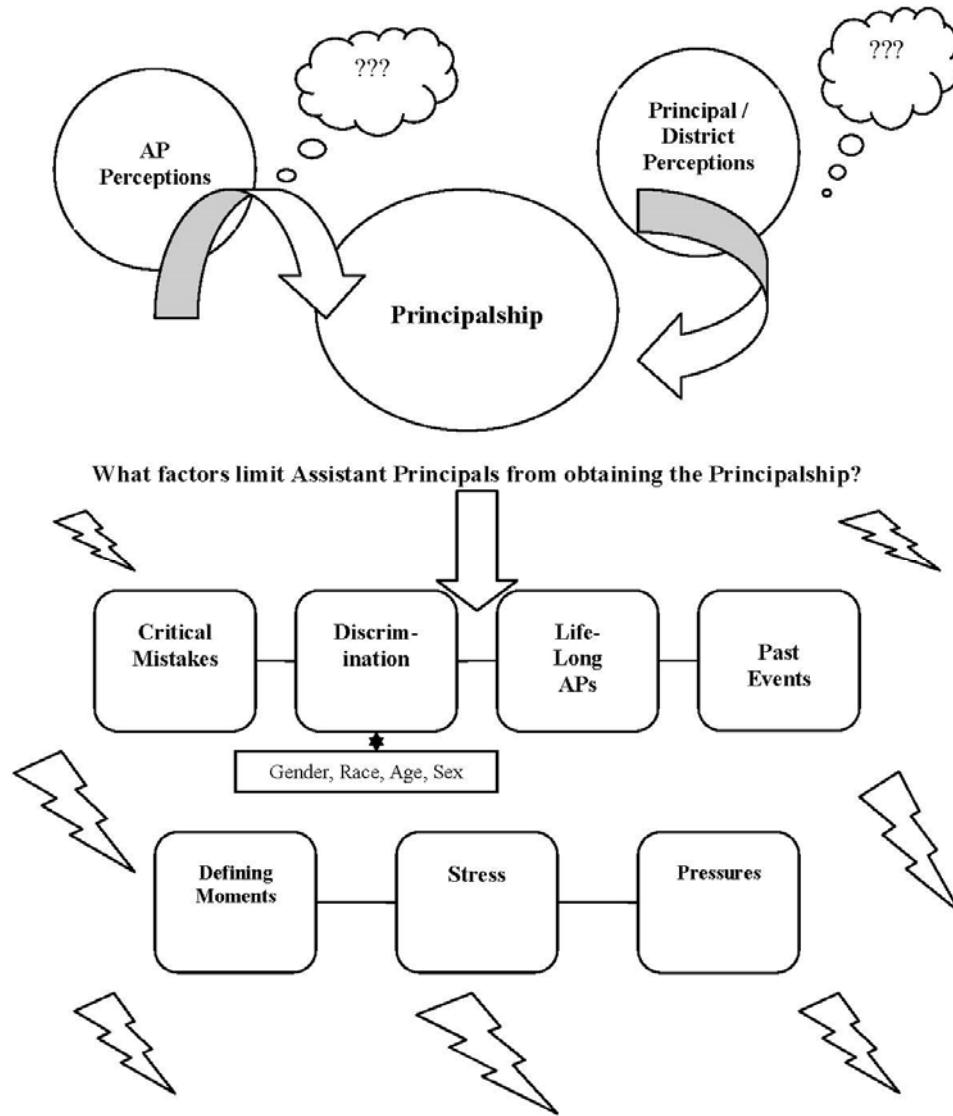


Figure 1. Concept Map

Problem Statement

An initial review of the literature suggests that most studies that focus on the principalship examine traits and characteristics that quality leaders possess. Marzano's work examines leadership traits and responsibilities and the correlation factors that promote student achievement. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty's (2005) meta-analysis of effective leadership characteristics of principals identifies situational awareness and flexibility as the two factors that have the most impact on student achievement from school leaders. However, the literature focuses on principal research and leadership traits that effective principals possess. Research that focuses on the role of the assistant principal and factors that have limited the climb to the principalship is under-developed. As researcher, I would like to examine possible factors that prevent or hinder capable individuals from obtaining the principalship. I would like to further research the issues surrounding individuals who wanted to achieve the principal position but were never offered the opportunity.

There is an abundance of educational literature that focuses on principal research. Robbins and Alvy (2004) discuss strategies for successfully navigating the principalship for new administrators. Kelehear (2005) examines the dual role of manager and instructional leader requirements of administrators. Having the ability to multitask and be knowledgeable of curricular issues while still being able to manage people, facilities and other resources are essential abilities for school administrators. Anderson (2007) questions in his research if school preparation programs do enough to prepare future principals to deal with the multifaceted elements within schools; I support this criticism

in that programs (especially those that allow add on licenses), do not fully prepare new assistant principals for the challenges of the principalship.

While there exists current research that involves assistant principals including the work of Oleszewski et al.'s (2012) literature review on the development of assistant principals, Barnett et al.'s (2012) study that focused on job realities of assistant principals, and Citty's (2010) dissertation that examined assistant principal mentoring and support, research on the assistant principalship is limited and underdeveloped. Additional research focused on assistant principals and factors that promote or limit promotion will not only serve districts and school leader programs in crafting professional development resources for the personal development of future and current assistant principals and principals; it will also assist current assistant principals in addressing these factors in order to attain a principalship.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of assistant principals as to why they have not or did not obtain the principalship (specifically reflecting on their past interviews, past experiences, subjectivity [including race, class, gender, etc.], preparation, and events such as critical mistakes made or lapses in judgment)?
2. What perceived shared experiences within the scope of assistant principals' daily work contribute to or limit ascension to the principalship?
3. What are the perceptions of principals and/or district level officials (who have worked with assistant principals) as to why assistant principals have not been

promoted to the principalship, and what changes do they perceive can be made to alleviate these barriers?

The Researcher's Positionality

As a school principal for seven years and now as a district leader, I have observed many assistant principals rise to the principalship. Hard-work, commitment, a focus on equity, sound leadership practices, and political acumen are all factors that help assistant principals rise to the position of school principal. I have observed several colleagues move through the ranks from teacher leader to assistant principal to principal. The growth and opportunities for most seem natural and inevitable. However, I wondered what factors are involved that limit the opportunities of certain assistant principals from obtaining the principalship. Seemingly these assistant principals possess similar characteristics of others who are selected to the principalship; however, there are several that become life-long assistant principals and never achieve the next promotion. Are these factors due to the lack of quality mentors; right time, place and fit issues; major events and/or situations that are difficult to overcome; the lack of a certain characteristic or trait that others possess; or the commitment of some to the assistant principal position, i.e., a desire to remain life-long assistant principals? Investigating assistant principals' perspectives would provide insightful feedback into why certain assistant principals never obtain the principalship position. In addition, as a former principal at all three levels, I have worked with several assistant principals over the years. I have observed assistant principals make critical mistakes and be involved in critical incidents that supervisors and district officials could never overlook. The mistakes and incidents that I have observed

include actions that indicated a lack of sound professional judgment; inappropriate comments directed at students, parents and other staff members; poor responses to not receiving promotions; inappropriate emails; and criminal acts that have occurred both on campus and away from school. As I have moved into the district office and now am responsible for evaluating and interviewing prospective principals, I have observed that prior critical mistakes are difficult to overcome. District leaders see critical mistakes as a window into future potential mistakes that could hurt the school district. Emphasizing the importance of eliminating critical mistakes would greatly enhance individuals' potential for promotion opportunities.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

A consistent finding in my review of literature on educational leadership involved the participants within the studies: most publications focused primarily on administrators at the principal and superintendent levels. While there are articles and publications involving assistant principals, such as Mason's 2007 guidebook on surviving the assistant principalship; Marshall's 1992 text that focused on the role of the AP and the specific challenges within the position; and the National Association of Elementary School Principals 1969 research study on APs in elementary schools, there is an apparent gap in the literature involving assistant principals and their perspectives as to why they have been unable or unwilling to pursue the principalship. Additionally, these examinations of the historical and typical roles of APs do not provide guidance on the new challenges faced by those in these school leadership positions.

The following topics have been identified thus far in my research: Traditional Role of the AP; Instructional Leadership Development and Succession; Mentoring; Job Satisfaction and Attraction; Pressure, Stress and Job Demands; Concern for Social Justice; Perceived Gender and Race Issues; Self Care; and Critical Incidents.

Traditional Role of the Assistant Principal

The role of the assistant principal began with secondary schools in the early 1900's. According to Marshall (1992), the role of the AP was created due to the

increasing size of secondary schools. The increase in numbers of students required an individual to help support the rules of the school (Marshall, 1992). In most cases, a male filled that role; this is supported by a 1969 study conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), where over 62% of APs in 1969 were males (NAESP, 1970, p. 11). The role of manager reinforced gender based stereotypes of the time frame, and as a result the role was dominated by males. As the industrial revolution and women's movements began to change the opportunities for women in schools, it also created a new position (of school leader) which eventually became the role of principal (Blount, 2012). Blount further details that many men who became the principal had little educational training as well (p. 6). As assistant principal positions became available, many were assumed by males also. So traditionally the role of AP has been one that is occupied by males and whose central work focus is managerial.

The summary of the 1969 NAESP study called the assistant principal "The Forgotten Man" (NAESP, 1970). The title of the study itself brings attention to and reinforces the assistant principalship was a man's role. The study was billed as the first comprehensive study of assistant principals, and it examined APs' thoughts on topics such as salary, working hours, roles within the school and preparedness for assuming the principalship. APs worked an average of ten years in the elementary setting as a teacher before becoming an AP (p. 73). In addition, 35% of the APs surveyed stated they wanted to become a future principal, and 21% stated they preferred the role of AP to classroom teaching (p. 73).

Assistant principals have traditionally been viewed as the custodian of managerial issues within schools, while the principal's role is reserved for the instructional leader.

Daresh (2004) identifies a problem with the definition of the assistant principal's role.

In short, you are neither the fish in charge of anything nor part of the flock of fowl. That is one of the main reasons why I believe that your service as an assistant principal might be one of the more difficult educational jobs that a person can do. Teachers know what they are supposed to do every day—they teach—and principals are hired to lead, or at least run the school. Counselors counsel. Assistant principals, on the other hand, do a lot of things that do not appear on the list of normal, routine activities of any school. (p. 5)

Many assistant principals are viewed as the school's disciplinarian. Mason (2007) calls the assistant principal the school's "police officer" (p. 13). The assistant principal often serves as the front line for all discipline issues, regardless of the level of the school (Mason, 2007). Assistant principals in a study by Marshall (1992) reported that discipline, building security, student activities, and building maintenance were the top four most frequent activities in their daily routine. Many of these roles might be stereotypically viewed as roles reserved for men.

Instructional Leadership Development and Succession

With so many responsibilities focused on managerial roles, it would appear difficult for APs to receive the necessary training in instructional leadership that is required of principals. APs face a basic role conflict: APs have managerial duties as discussed, but also have additional responsibilities of evaluating teachers Glanz (2004). The time associated with managerial duties, does not allow APs to effectively master

instructional leadership. As a result, APs often struggle to provide meaningful assistance for teachers in the instructional process (p. 8).

Universities and colleges train potential school leaders using standards such as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Individuals in public school administrator programs receive education and training in the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES) standards and practices that are relevant in school administration evaluations. In addition, some individuals in school leader programs benefit from Principal Fellows programs that combine academic coursework with internship experiences. These internship experiences provide valuable on the job training for perspective school administrators. Although coursework and internships provide a foundation to school administration, the realities of the actual job require additional and ongoing leadership development. Hartley (2009) addresses the dual role dilemma of assistant principals: On one hand the AP has to maintain the daily duties of the AP, while also finding time to gain instructional leadership opportunities. Hartley (2009) summarizes that the failure to fulfill the AP's managerial duties consistently will most likely result in the termination of the position; there is no flexibility, because if the principal does not have confidence in the AP's ability to perform routine tasks, confidence will be lost in other abilities as well (p. 26).

Assistant principals can begin to align themselves for the principalship by gaining experiences and practice in curriculum and instructional practices and other areas in which they feel deficient (Daresh, 2004). Hartley (2009) addresses three essential skills to refine as an AP: being proactive; taking pride in the managerial work; working outside

the office. First, the AP must be proactive in problem solving. Being organized and prepared can assist in being proactive (Hartley, 2009). An AP who can not only see a potential problem, but also suggest potential solutions can be a valuable asset. Second, the AP must take pride in all the managerial roles assigned. Completing these duties and tasks in a timely and professional manner will instill trust and confidence in the AP's potential as a principal; this trust will allow the principal to provide additional opportunities for instructional leadership. Third, working outside the office is often necessary, especially for the AP who wants to progress to the principalship. Completing assignments and activities at home can allow the AP to catch up and begin the next day organized and ready to focus on the priorities (Hartley, 2009).

The savvy administrator will anticipate problems and plan accordingly, but even the best planned day can fall victim to certain unexpected problems—when it rains, it pours. Problems that are newsworthy and can affect the safety of students and staff will require immediate attention and subsequent action along with many hours of paperwork and public rapport. These problems subsequently shift instruction to the back burner. However, I encourage assistant principals to plan to go into each school day with instruction as their first priority and then play the hand that is dealt as the day unfolds. (Hartley, 2009, p. 28)

Assistant principals who do not continue to refine their instructional leadership practice could find their future professional options limited. This problem is compounded when coupled with the daily managerial roles of the AP, which can consume the entire day. As a result, assistant principals should focus on their own continued leadership development; assistant principals who take advantage of leadership succession programs within their own school districts may have an advantage on others

who do not participate. Some districts maintain these programs to nurture and develop future principals and to cultivate future talent within the district. In addition, assistant principals receive training from their universities and colleges within their school leadership programs. Normore (2007) identified three goals in developing future school leaders: leadership development and succession programs; recruitment and selection; and socialization (both professional and organizational). Normore (2007) states that “Planning for leadership succession is vital to any organization . . . social capital is built through relationships based on trust, respect, and integrity that are translated into the culture and the organizational structure” (p. 4). Normore also emphasizes that a quality succession plan is linked to effective recruitment strategies to ensure a continuous flow of competent candidates to replace leaders. Normore refers to the importance of the socialization of potential leaders. The socialization involves not only professional socialization, but organizational socialization as well. Normore (2007) states, “Socializing aspiring and practicing school leaders into new roles involves implicit and explicit pre- and post-appointment opportunities to learn about leading” (pp. 8–9). Implementing programs such as leadership academies, mentoring support programs, and professional development opportunities will provide the socialization opportunities for future school leaders. Oleszewski et al. (2012) also discuss the importance of principal development programs that focus on growing your own future principals. Investing in the development of APs can ensure that districts are producing quality future principal candidates.

Planning for principal succession is critical to the successful continuation of district leadership. Zepeda, Bengston, and Parylo's (2012) research reviewed principal succession plans of four school districts in Georgia and found that school districts identified leadership development programs and mentoring support as critical components to successful principal succession. The authors identified four themes: sense of urgency for succession; development of leaders; mentoring; and building collaborative relationships (Zepeda et al., 2012).

Nelson, Oliver, and Capps (2006) interviewed doctoral students in curriculum and supervision programs who were supervisors in training, curriculum and counseling programs to identify factors that impacted their growth and potential as an effective supervisor. This study, although not involving assistant principals, did focus on areas that could also impact assistant principal perceptions of their potential effectiveness as future principals. Nelson et al. (2006) identified the following themes through their analysis of data and interviews: learning opportunities; watching and observing; growth opportunities; reflection; and connections. The authors indicated that the opportunity to observe, reflect and make connections was vital to the perceived success of the training participants received (Nelson et al., 2006). Allowing future potential principals the same opportunities would also create additional comfort and confidence in advancing into new leadership positions.

Initiative is an important quality that can greatly aid the instructional leadership of APs. Glanz (2004) offers suggestions for APs to refine and develop their instructional leadership. First, APs should embrace the concept of developing learning communities

that support democratic and collegial relationships among teachers (p. 13). No one individual can be an expert in all curricular areas, but an instructional leader can serve as a facilitator of learning and collaboration (Glanz, 2004). Another critical component in developing one's instructional leadership is by embracing fundamental district core instructional values and expectations. Knowing the district's initiatives and being able to articulate those to teachers can build trust in the APs ability to serve as an instructional leader (Glanz, 2004). Insights from practitioners such as Glanz (2004) and other organizations such as local Principal and Assistant Principal Associations can assist APs in identifying areas for needed growth.

Mentoring for Assistant Principals

Another critical element that can aid assistant principals in their preparation for the principalship is quality mentor experiences. Daresh (2004) stated finding a mentor is “the single most powerful thing an assistant principal can do to enhance personal survival and effectiveness” (p. 97). Oleszewski et al. (2012) encourages assistant principals to develop a positive mentoring relationship with their current principal. The principal who mentors their AP is more likely to share and encourage professional development as well as providing opportunities for additional leadership roles (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Mentoring opportunities can provide many benefits to assistant principals. The ability to talk honestly with a mentor can reassure inexperienced assistant principals as they reflect on their practice. Mentoring helps develop trust and promotes leadership development (Hibert, 2000). As a first year assistant principal, I was assigned a principal mentor who was able to assist my personal leadership development. Assistant principals who are not

offered or do not seek out mentors could face many obstacles in their early years in administration. Mentoring opportunities provide assistant principals an opportunity to hear and give honest feedback on the struggles and demands of the administrative assignment (Hilbert, 2000). Mentoring opportunities also provide assistant principals with the chance to practice and reflect in a non-judgmental manner. Hilbert (2000) stresses the importance of trust during the mentoring experience. Building trust with your mentor is the cornerstone of the relationship. Positive mentor experiences can help assistant principals to understand what and when issues should be confronted and when they should be left alone (Hilbert, 2000). Having a positive mentor experience can help assistant principals avoid mistakes and pitfalls that could ultimately derail the assistant principal's hopes of becoming a principal. LaRose (1987) researched required components for new assistant principal professional development that included mentoring and other professional development experiences. The in-service component allows fellow assistant principals the opportunity to meet together once per month to gain insight and knowledge through discussion; the mentorship component follows a peer coaching model that provides a principal mentor who is available anytime for assistance and advice; and the observation component allows assistant principals the chance to observe others and be observed to receive feedback on their administrative practices (LaRose, 1987). Providing these opportunities for assistant principals allows them to develop effective strategies and skills that could promote their willingness and readiness to pursue the principalship.

Mentoring and the impact of reflection on lessons learned from experiences was the focus of an article by Shindel (2004). Assistant principals who work under quality principals are more likely to learn and embrace effective leadership skills from the observation and opportunities that arise (Shindel, 2004). Assistant principal growth entails providing assistant principals the chance to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. All administrators make mistakes, but without the guidance of a quality mentor, those mistakes are often repeated over and over. Having mentors who allow for mistakes, build trust, share responsibility and share their wisdom enables assistant principals to continue their preparation for the principalship (Shindel, 2004). However, when assistant principals are not afforded these mentoring opportunities, the pressures, stress and demands of the position build, and as a result critical mistakes and frustrations arise. These factors could impact and influence assistant principals' desire to remain in administrative leadership positions.

Job Satisfaction and Attraction

Job satisfaction is generally considered a critical factor to those employed in any workforce, including principals and assistant principals. Principals typically work long hours each week on administrative duties, not including attending student activities and special events. School administrators (including principals and assistant principals) spend a great deal of time attending to parent issues, community related tasks, student and bus discipline and facilities management (Hinton & Kastner, 2000); these managerial activities are often shifted to the role of the AP. When assistant principals are dissatisfied with a job, they find themselves in a dilemma that can affect their entire lives. Given

these many tasks, it is important to reveal what contributes to job satisfaction for public school leaders. In addition, the factors that limit job satisfaction may also influence assistant principals' willingness to pursue the principalship.

Assistant principals may have various reasons for applying for principal positions. Some may feel they possess the necessary qualities for the position. Others may crave the positional power that comes with a leadership position, while others may simply feel they can do the job better than their current principal. Walker and Kwan (2009) conducted a study on the factors that attract individuals to apply for secondary principal positions. Their study involved surveying 164 potential principal candidates in Hong Kong who were interested in becoming a principal. Walker and Kwan (2009) found that three variables impacted the attractiveness of certain positions to assistant principals: autonomy and innovation; convenience and fit; and familiarity and status. Prospective principals appeared to have both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivated them to these positions.

A study by Conrad and Rosser (2007) examined the satisfaction levels of educational leaders and how it impacted decisions to seek career advancement or to leave the position. In reviewing job satisfaction, Conrad and Rosser (2007) identified nine work-life constructs that were the focus of a survey that was administered to 652 assistant principals, principals and superintendents. These constructs included: career support; recognition for competence; interpersonal building relationships; discrimination; working conditions; interpersonal district relations; personal and family issues; job satisfaction; and future plans. Conrad and Rosser (2007) found that the majority of respondents were

satisfied with their current positions. Constructs that had the strongest positive impact on individuals wanting to stay and seek advancement were the following: interpersonal district relationships, career support, recognition, inter-building relationships, and work environment (p. 586). Conrad and Rosser (2007) found that personal and family issues had the largest negative impact on satisfaction and desire to leave the field.

The difficulties most often identified with the job of high school administrators include: (a) 60- to 80-hour work weeks; (b) complexity of the job; (c) unending supervision of night activities; (d) minimal pay difference between top teachers and administrators; (e) high expectations; and (f) federal, state, and district mandates (Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). It is extremely important to identify the concepts that lead to satisfaction for principals. The demands of the position can create frequent turnover if individuals are not satisfied with their jobs. Frequent turnover can also create situations where assistant principals may be promoted prematurely to fill a vacancy, when the AP may not be ready. Allowing future school administrators the opportunities to fully embrace the complexities of the principalship would enable assistant principals to make an informed decision about whether to seek a principalship. Spanneut (2007) reviewed the importance of including tours of multiple school campuses during interview processes to determine if individuals were suited for specific school sites. Often principals are not matched to schools that support their individual talents and strengths. This practice could assist in alleviating undue pressure and stress by allowing districts and individuals to assess if a particular school was a good fit. Identifying practices that can maximize job satisfaction for school principals, could also reduce the turnover rate. Similar factors

could impact and influence assistant principals as they weigh whether to pursue the principalship.

A study of assistant principal career satisfaction at the secondary level (Sutter, 1996) revealed the following results: assistant principals who felt they were accomplishing meaningful work were more satisfied; assistant principals who felt there were opportunities for advancement were more satisfied; assistant principals who wanted to remain lifelong assistant principals had a lower job satisfaction rating (Sutter, 1996). These findings support that job satisfaction is connected to willingness to pursue the principalship. Assistant principals who wanted to remain lifelong assistant principals may feel that way because of the lack of support, training development opportunities, time commitments, and other frustrations. These questions and the age of this 1996 study would indicate further research is needed within this topic.

Pressure, Stress, Demands, and Burnout Associated with the Principalship

The role of school administrator is one full of pressure, stress and job demands. These factors could impact the desire and willingness of assistant principals to pursue the principalship. For most individuals in education, particularly those who work in public schools, it is no secret that principals typically put in many hours each week on the job. Principals are constantly battling time demands and work commitments within the job on a daily basis. Principals are tied to their electronic devices and smart phones which make them accessible 24 hours a day. Many communities expect to see the principal at all school events and functions while still maintaining regular office hours and attending all district events as well. Additionally, principals are typically one of the first school

employees to arrive and one of the last to depart each day. Hinton and Kastner (2000) report that high school principals work an average of 54 hours each week for approximately 240 days each year; these long hours and time commitments can become burdensome for principals. These many hours can take a physical and mental toll on one's well-being, health and outlook. Often, personal commitments, family, and attention to one's health suffer due to the work-time required of principals. A study by Borg and Riding (1993) indicated that principals report a significant degree of job stress related to time on the job and time away from family. This time commitment for principals undoubtedly contributes to the high rate of burnout among today's school administrators. Guterman (2007) reported that one quarter of superintendents who were surveyed stated that the excessive demands of time was a primary factor in teachers not wanting to pursue school administration. Could these excessive work demands also have an impact on the decision for APs to pursue the principalship (thus creating a possible recruitment dilemma)?

Another study by Hewitt and Stambuck (2008) supported the time demands of the principalship position. Over 400 teachers in Arkansas were asked about factors why they would not consider career opportunities in the principalship. Time commitments was listed as a major reason for not pursuing career advancement, even though these teachers had been identified as teacher leaders who possessed leadership skills suitable for the principalship (Hewitt & Stambuck, 2008). Assistant principals know firsthand the time commitments, pressures and demands associated within principal positions. Assistant principals work alongside their principals each day, observing the time requirements of

the principalship. These factors could be possible influences and/or obstacles on assistant principals' decisions to not pursue the principalship.

In addition to time, school administrators face tremendous pressures within their daily responsibilities. Often these pressures lead to additional stressors that could potentially impact the wellness of principals. Assistant principals are fully aware of these pressures and stressors as they experience them as well within their daily job duties. The concept of principal pressure and stress was reviewed by West, Peck, and Reitzug (2010). Pressure has always been a component of the principal position; however, principal pressure and stress has increased due to federal and state mandates, increased accountability through testing, and the ever-increasing time demands on principals. Are assistant principals aware of these increasing demands, and what degree do these demands impact future decisions to pursue the principalship?

West et al. (2010) discuss sustained and emerging categories of principal pressure. The emerging pressures could certainly be factors that are worth investigating further through the lens of assistant principals. Bessier, Peters, and Thacker (2014) examine health and wellness practices of secondary school principals. Their findings included that principals often neglect their own personal health as well as their families due to the demands of the principal position (p. 240). Throughout the study, open-ended comments revealed the passion with which

Administrators performed their roles, but the comments also suggested that many were ill equipped with strategies to balance that passion with wellness components of their personal lives. (Beisser et al., 2014, p. 243)

One would assume that the research of Bessier et al. (2014) would also apply to assistant principals as they form their own opinions concerning the perceived stressors and pressures within the principalship. Some assistant principals develop effective strategies to combat the pressure, while others flee from the pressure packed events. Examining assistant principal perceptions and actions due to job related stress is important when studying factors that may limit or prohibit assistant principals' promotion to the principalship. Cranston, Tromans, and Reugebrink (2004) conducted a study of deputy principals (assistant principals) in Australia and surveyed these participants regarding their perceptions on school leadership. The authors indicate that the assistant principals reported high stress and pressure within their jobs and also a high number of required work hours. Cranston et al. (2004) also report that many assistant principals were satisfied with being an assistant principal with only 40% wanting to achieve the principalship position despite the daily challenges. I found this to be interesting, and I would like to know how many assistant principals in the Region 5 district are satisfied with being a life-long assistant principal.

The job of school administrators is challenging. Principals and assistant principals can experience job burnout routinely. This burnout can be a result of several factors that may impact one's decision to remain in the profession or to seek promotion opportunities. Schermuly, Schermuly, and Meyer (2010) define burnout as a symptom in response to stress consisting of three key elements: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment. In addition, the researchers indicated that emotional exhaustion is the greatest predictor for several other

stressors such as: job tension, work-family conflict, job satisfaction, personal life satisfaction, desire to leave the profession, depression and physical symptoms. (Schermuly et al., 2010).

Individuals in public school administration often weigh the costs and benefits associated with the principalship. These factors may influence assistant principals' desire to pursue the principalship, and it also may impact the decision of district officials when they are deciding who to promote to these positions. Research (Cusick, 2003) in Michigan focused on the reasons for the state's principal shortage. Within the study the researcher examined various factors and perceptions of administrators, superintendents, principals and teachers in addition to a focus group within one specific Michigan district to determine what factors resulted in fewer principal applicants (Cusick, 2003). Findings in the study resulted in several possibilities. Cusick discovered that factors previously discussed such as time, stress and job demands were influential. In addition, individuals considered the location of districts, the resources both financial and material that were present in sites, and the pay (Cusick, 2003). Research in Michigan examined top teacher salaries and compared them to those of assistant principals and principals. In many instances the top teacher salary was equal to or exceeded elementary school principal pay and closely mirrored middle school principal pay; there were noted exceptions for secondary/high school principals (Cusick, 2003). These findings question whether it is financially worth it to pursue the principalship. Knowing the time demands and the stress that principals face, coupled with the reality of fairly equal pay of top level teachers, the costs may outweigh the benefits of attempting to pursue the principalship.

Self-Care of Future Prospective Principals

School administrators often neglect their own personal well-being and needs. The time commitments and demands of the job create additional hardships in attempting to maintain one's personal health and wellness. These factors could influence assistant principals to dismiss opportunities for advancement to the principalship.

Consistent with the quantifiable results, the principals' comments such as this "Time demands make finding balance a challenge. Board members say they want me to be balanced, but there really isn't anything professionally that I can give up" (comment from study participant). (Beisser et al., 2014, p. 244)

Several studies emphasize the idea of self-care and recovery. Self-care involves purposefully finding the time to renew and recharge. Protecting one's self ensures that individuals can find balance among the hectic demands and challenges of the principalship. Edgar (2005) proposes that personal happiness is a key element to finding balance between work and personal life. Trenberth and Drewe (2002) report the importance of leisure as a means to reduce work related stress for principals. Additionally, Burford (2004) concludes that taking care of personal interests can ensure and promote a sense of balance. Fullan (2005) has developed a practice called "cyclical energizing" (p. 17) which includes similar notions and emphasizes the importance of recovery and recuperation. Duke (1998) states that all leaders need time away from the demands of the job, and finding this time can further assist in accomplishing the goals for the school.

Prasad's (2008) findings showed that happier principals are often more likely to employ a humanistic leadership style and that their teams experience greater happiness at work as well. Despite the benefits of promoting one's self care, the challenging issue remains in finding the time to accomplish this. Assistant principals who work beside principals recognize these challenges, and these factors may impact an assistant principal's choice to pursue the principalship. Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, and Steele (1996) propose establishing the ethic of care mindset to focus on relationships in schools.

The ethic of caring emphasizes connection through responsibility to others rather than to rights and rules. It involves fidelity to relationships with others that is based on more than just personal liking or regard. An ethic of care does not establish a list of guiding principles to blindly follow, but rather a moral touchstone for decision making. (Marshall et al., 1996, p. 277)

An ethic of care could provide the needed perspective to guide a principal/assistant principal in their actions and decision making (Marshall et al., 1996, p. 278).

Establishing this ethic of care could aid prospective principals in finding balance within a demanding job.

Concern for Social Justice

District decisions made based on perceived or actual gender, race and or other discriminatory practices can prevent certain individuals from promotion to the principalship. In turn, an individual's lack of social justice awareness could also impact a district's decision to promote an assistant principal. Many districts today are faced with diverse populations and cultures. As a result, many districts want to promote individuals with an awareness of social justice. McDonald (2005) reviewed teacher education

programs and how they addressed social justice education within education programs, finding that many programs have courses regarding social justice awareness, but fewer fully integrate social justice throughout the entire program. If the goals of social justice programs are to increase awareness and action designed to promote equity for all marginalized groups, then certainly assistant principals need to be advocates for these principles. As McDonald (2005) states, this advocacy work would improve the ability of individuals working with diverse and marginalized groups.

Recognizing the need for social justice awareness requires leaders to be reflective of their own feelings and beliefs regarding race, sex, and lifestyle choices. Capper, Theoharis and Sebastian (2006) researched the needed skills, experiences and actions that school leaders need to promote social justice in schools. Capper et al (2006) stated that “school leaders need to embody a social justice consciousness within their belief systems and values that includes needing to possess a deep understanding of power relations and social construction including white privilege, heterosexism, poverty, misogyny, and ethnocentrism” (p. 213). Theoharis (2007) further stated the importance of the members of the dominant power group to recognize the need to identify practices to support the needs of the most marginalized members within schools. Theoharis (2007) examined the resistance to social justice practices that principals encountered, as well as practices that counter the resistance they face from others who do not embrace a social justice mindset. These enacted resistances by school leaders included avenues to improve school culture, improve student achievement for marginalized groups and increase staff capacity. Santamaria (2014) examined school leaders of color who focused on social justice and

inequities of marginalized groups. Santamaria's (2014) case study indicated that principals of color purposefully and intentionally promote community engagement, thus promoting equity for marginalized individuals. Santamaria (2014) identified applied leadership characteristics that she stated are essential for school leaders in promoting social justice. Those characteristics include the following: critical conversations; use of critical race theory lens; group consensus; stereotype threat; academic discourse; honoring constituents; leading by example; trust with mainstream; and servant leadership (Santamaria, 2014). These characteristics can provide support in maintaining awareness for social justice. In addition, examining personal feelings and bias can begin to open reflective activities that can assist APs to grow personally and professionally. Furman (2012) focused on the need for school leaders who understand and promote social justice within their districts and schools. Furman (2012) states social justice is a major concern due to the increasing diversity found in schools, especially in urban settings. Furman's review of literature focused on deficit thinking within school districts that limits social justice. Furman proposes that preparation programs should focus on developing the capacity of future leaders to reflect and act on social justice issues. Roberts and Green (2013) examined social justice in rural settings. Often rural areas are also exposed to economic distress, which manifests itself in disadvantage and underachievement. This disadvantage creates the need for spacial social justice within rural areas (Roberts & Green, 2013) or the ability to identify disadvantage based on location and the lack of resources and opportunities in these specific rural areas. Assistant principals who do not reflect on social justice issues are likely to be overlooked for the principalship in schools

that have marginalized groups. As Wiggan (2007) states, “students’ voices often are presented by adults, who articulate what they believe students to be thinking or feeling” (p. 324). Providing meaningful opportunities for students (especially marginalized students) to share their insights and thoughts will promote social justice in our schools.

Thus there should be a shift in power dynamics, such that students and researchers share in the development and design of research processes. Students are knowers; therefore, they possess knowledge and insights that would benefit a more open and fluid dialogue on achievement. (Wiggan, 2007, p. 324)

Assistant principals who lack social justice awareness may think they can represent all groups, but how do others see these opportunities? To what extent could a lack of social justice be a factor that prohibits assistant principals from obtaining the principalship? This is a question I explored in this research.

Perceived Discriminatory Bias Issues Related to Promotions

Marginalized groups including minorities and women can feel as if they have been victims of bias and discrimination within the workplace. However, there are increasing opportunities for minorities in principalship positions. Wesson and Hudson (2012) state “opportunities for leadership appear to come about as a result of the increasing diversity of student populations in urban profile schools and school districts that are largely African American and Hispanic” (p. 28). As more job opportunities develop in predominantly minority communities and schools, qualified candidates who are overlooked for the principalship, could develop perceptions that discriminatory practices were the reason these candidates were overlooked (especially among minority

and female APs). Women, in general, are underrepresented at the school leadership level. Numbers of women in leadership become even more concerning when considering both gender and ethnicity (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). In addition, school leaders and districts often perpetuate gender equity issues by dismissing the occurrence of bias. Ragland, Hatcher, and Thomas (2005) examined gender bias in schools as they relate to cultural norms. Some female assistant principals perceive that a district's cultural norm is to promote males for leadership roles; this perceived bias does warrant exploration. Reis, Young, and Jury's (1999) article focused on gender issues and perceptions in obtaining administrative positions. Reis et al. begin with a quote from H. Burgess (1989): "Teaching is a good job for women but a career with prospects for men" (p. 71). In Reis et al.'s experimental study, both men and women reviewed fictitious resumes and reference letters of hypothetical men and women candidates who were applying for assistant principal positions. The hypothesis in this study was the screening process would provide evidence of gender bias based on which candidates were selected for interviews. The focus of this study was on the pre-interview stage and Reis et al. contended that gender bias would limit opportunities for interviews for female candidates. However, Reis et al. (1999) noted that this study indicated a preference for female candidates for the interviews. Reis et al. (1999) suggest that these findings are related to an acknowledgement of an existing void in female school leaders and an increasing awareness and sensitivity of school administrators to the legal hiring processes involving discrimination practices. In addition, interviewing females and hiring females are two different matters.

Assistant principals may feel that their gender has impacted their personal opportunities for career advancement. Female APs who actively pursue the position of principal may feel discriminated against if they are overlooked for principal positions. Female assistant principals may perceive there to be discriminatory practices in place that have prohibited their promotion opportunities. Assistant principals may feel that some district leaders want males only at certain schools and or levels based on stereotypical roles of gender. Blount (2012) discusses the “danger of stepping out of place” for females. Men can feel threatened due to gains and success of women. Blount states, “With the social, economic and political successes of the women’s movement, some men perceived that they were losing their power” (2012, p. 7). Additional factors that could impact female assistant principals’ perceptions of gender bias include the work –family conflict involving traditional stereotypical roles of females. McGee (2010) examines self-imposed barriers of females wanting to become administrators in Florida public school systems. McGee focused on women and the barriers they perceived that hindered their advancement: anxiety over family; politics (good ole boys network); lack of network; lack of confidence; job location; child care issues; employers’ negative gender attitudes; lack of assertiveness; spouse’s career conflict; reluctance for risk; desire to start a family; lack of peer support; lack of family support; lack of motivation (p. 9). McGee found that women generally start administration posts later as a result of raising children and family responsibilities. McGee states that through his research, the women participants learned that they could control their perceived self-imposed barriers based on choices they made. Wilmore (2012) states “district concern over women being off the

job during their child-bearing years still worries female administrators; but this is a fact of life” (p. 43). Female assistant principals should not have to feel that their personal and family life decisions will impact their career opportunities, however, this is a reality for many.

Akiba and Reichardt (2004) examined predictors of elementary school leaders’ mobility in Colorado over a span from 1999 to 2001. The authors found that attrition rates of assistant principals and principals who are female and minority are more likely to result in leaving their schools at age 35 or younger and at age 56 or older. I was curious about these age related findings and reflected on the assistant principals who I know who have yet to obtain principalships and their ages, gender and race. These factors could indicate several areas of concern for females such as traditional and stereotypical roles perceived of women; the challenge of raising a family and being a parent including the perceived role of the female as the primary child care provider; and the lack of potential networking and mentorship opportunities for female assistant principals. These factors could indicate areas of concern for social justice issues regarding ethical hiring practices as perceived from female assistant principals.

The scarcity of women in the role of secondary principal is a phenomenon worldwide (Coleman, 2001). While women make up at least one-half of secondary teachers, they are in the minority in secondary administrative positions (Coleman, 2001; McLay & Brown, 2001; Morris, 1999). This international pattern is supported by statistics from New Zealand, Australia, the USA, the UK, Germany, Africa, Central America, and India (Coleman, 2001). Eckman (2002) conducted a study that examined

views of high school (female) administrators. The findings indicate that role conflict within females impacts career decisions. These conflicts included family demands associated with child rearing. Eckman (2002) concluded that role conflict negatively impacted job satisfaction.

Professionals in the field of education must recognize that gender plays a role in how or if women obtain secondary principalships. Rusch (2004) explained the perpetuation of these phenomena as shared understandings among professional administrators, whether male or female, that silence the ideas and individuals that might disrupt the privilege of dominance such as the notion that secondary principals need to portray the 'macho' leadership style to resolve discipline issues (Grove & Montgomery, 1999; McLay & Brown, 2001). Wilmore (2012) states, "women mentoring women to avenues of mutual success is our key to mutual professional development and success" (p. 41). Witmer (2006) discussed the role of networking for women and how the traditional good old boys club tactics cannot work for them. As a result, women have to develop their own networking groups through other avenues such as book clubs, online groups, etc. (Witmer, 2006). "Women's networking is a different story. While women recognize that the ladder to success is supported by networking, they also realize that the usual OBC (old boys club) and its methods will not work for them" (Witmer, 2006, p. 249).

Increasing the number of women in administrative positions sets the stage for a pool that is more reflective of the overall composition of educators working in school

settings and ensures role models and networks of support for those who aspire to formal leadership positions.

Finley's (2013) research centered on African American assistant principals and their perceptions on job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and their desire to become a principal. The researcher used a qualitative case study approach as he interviewed six African American assistant principals (three male and three female). Finley's findings illustrated that the participants had positive feelings of self-efficacy, were satisfied with their jobs and wanted to aspire to the principalship, even though they had yet to reach the position. In the researcher's case study, Finley makes the following analysis of the potential impact of race in hiring practices:

At one time in American history, the opportunity for African Americans to participate and compete in the education market place was limited – in many school districts Negroes need not apply! Today, we read on various job websites, paper job postings, and other forms of job applications the disclaimer: we do not discriminate based on race, color, religion, gender or national origin. We are an equal opportunity employer. However, race prejudice is not always obvious and clear to its victims. Thus, the question of whether the six African American volunteers believe their race, gender, or age was/is an obstacle blocking their desires to ascend the principalship of New York City Public School is of value. (Finley, 2013, p. 161)

Finley (2013) states that half of his case study participants did feel that their race was a determining factor in and possible hindrance to the principalship. Social justice leadership requires individuals (especially those of us who are members of the white male dominant culture) to recognize the role that privilege and power play in the continued oppression of marginalized groups of people. These marginalized groups can

consist of any number of groups who are identified as being different or outside of the mainstream, who also lack the privilege and power that the members of the dominant culture possess. My study will hopefully include some participants who identify as a member of a marginalized group. The implications of such participants will add value to this study.

Critical Mistakes and Incidents

Critical mistakes and incidents may not be recognized as career threatening events by assistant principals; however, some events are never forgotten by district officials. Such critical mistakes can derail future opportunities. Many critical mistakes can be attributed to the inability to effectively deal with conflict. Anderson (2007) notes that conflict is specifically addressed in three of the Educational Leadership Constituency Council (ELCC) Standards II, IV, and V for school administrators. Standard II deals with potential conflict with promoting a positive school climate and culture. Standard IV requires administrators to meet the demands of families and communities in supporting student needs and interests. Standard V requires administrators to act in an ethical, fair and consistent manner to support the needs of students. Conflict is certain to arise in any school setting. The inability to effectively process these conflicts can result in major critical mistakes on the part of school administrators. Anderson (2007) analyzed the frequency of conflict types. He examined student conflict, parent conflict, teacher and staff conflict, supervisor conflict and district level conflict. These potential areas all could pose challenges that could result in a critical mistake. Examples of critical mistakes would be decisions that were made by assistant principals that resulted in

greater turmoil and conflict. For example, dismissing school in the absence of consultation with the district office, unprofessional response to disappointments in seeking promotion, suspending students without due process, or indicating that an employee would be terminated and should not report to work are examples of critical mistakes that may be difficult to overcome. The perceptions of district officials on critical mistakes and incidents would be insightful and possibly help shape future means to avoid these types of critical mistakes.

Reducing the possibility of critical mistakes should be a priority for APs who are seeking the principalship. Barnett et al. (2012) conducted research that examined the personal and professional characteristics that were essential for successful APs. The personal qualities identified as most important were the following: emotional intelligence, flexibility, and positive reactions to other people (p. 112). An analysis of these personal characteristics reveals comparable results from both novice and experienced assistant principals as seen in the following research study participant responses:

Patience, patience, patience. Bite your tongue. Know your role and that you are not the principal. You may not agree with the decisions that are made, but you are there to support your principal – Novice assistant principal # 6. (p. 113)

You have to be willing to change your point of view. Open mindedness is important; being open to other thoughts, opinions and ways of doing things – Novice assistant principal # 24. (p. 113)

You absolutely have to be flexible and adjust well to unforeseen changes. I can't even begin to tell you how many times I've had hope of getting certain things accomplished in one day and due to unforeseen

circumstances, none of it gets done – Experienced assistant principal # 18.
(p. 113)

Developing internal discipline can develop the needed leadership qualities that will reduce the possibilities of making critical mistakes. Good (2008) discusses the need to become more internally disciplined when establishing and following your goals. The discipline can form habits of sound judgment and actions that will enable assistant principals to avoid making critical mistakes that could potentially derail the potential to become a principal.

Future Research

The role of the assistant principal is important to the total operation of successful schools. Districts need a stable pool of assistant principals who are ready to assume the principalship when openings are available. The majority of educational leadership research has focused on the principalship, yet in order to have effective principals in the future, more specific research on assistant principals is needed. Assistant principals who have been unable to attain the principalship served as the focus of my study. I was curious to know what current APs perceived to be factors that have led to them being stuck in the role of AP. Identifying these perceptions and the perceptions of district principals and supervisors did provide insight into the problem and possible solutions to the stuck AP. There are many assistant principals who never move to the principalship; examining the shared experiences of these assistant principals through qualitative study will assist in identifying professional development and support for individuals who seek a principalship. In addition, in reviewing the historical and typical roles of assistant

principals, it is clear that daily work responsibility does not prepare all APs to assume the principalship. Further exploration of how perceived discriminatory practices involving gender and race impact district decisions in selecting principals is interesting and can promote equitable opportunities for minority groups. In addition, I believe exploration of typical roles assigned to assistant principals based on gender is worthy of research. In my experience, often male assistant principals are typically assigned buses and athletics, while female assistant principals may be more likely to be given curricular and instructional activities and responsibilities. The position of assistant principal is vital to school success and the effective operation of the instructional day. More research that focuses on identifying and overcoming the barriers to the principalship would ensure continuity for districts when searching for highly qualified and capable school leaders.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY: A BASIC INTERPRETIVE QUALITATIVE APPROACH

In this chapter I detail my research study's methodology. The qualitative research was designed as "a basic interpretive and descriptive study... [where] the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation" (Merriam, 2002, p. 6) by asking how and why questions. Aspects of the study design align with components associated with phenomenology in which the shared common experiences and perceptions of assistant principals provided insight into why certain assistant principals have yet to achieve the principalship. The phenomenon shared by assistant principals in this study is that they are "stuck" in the AP role. Asking APs why they feel they are stuck, as well as identifying what experiences and/or responsibilities assigned to APs that may contribute to being stuck drove the focus of this study. However, I triangulated this data with the experiences of current district leaders, principals and district supervisors (through the use of focus groups) to gather their thoughts on why APs become stuck. These participants provided insight into why certain APs get stuck in this role and how, potentially, they can get unstuck. The findings of this study will hopefully be valuable for all APs and districts that have individuals stuck in AP mode. This chapter will begin with a deeper discussion of qualitative methodology, followed by details of the specific research methods used in the study.

Research Tradition

The research tradition of this study was basic interpretive qualitative methodology, which utilized aspects of phenomenology. Groenewald (2004) provides an overview of various views on phenomenology as a methodology. He cites Edmund Husserl as founder of the concept in which individuals live their reality through their perceptions. Researchers use phenomenology to examine the shared and lived experiences of individuals and examine those experiences as they search for common themes. Merriam (2002) describes phenomenological studies as being focused on how complex meaning can be constructed from simple moments of direct experiences and actions. These shared actions and experiences can begin to identify the essence of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2002).

This study focused on the lived experiences of nine assistant principals who want(ed) to achieve the principalship, but for various reasons seven APs never have (were) provided the opportunity. District leaders were asked about the APs in their district, as well as other APs they have worked with in the past that are or have been stuck. The concept of being stuck in the AP role was the focus of the study and was examined through the lens of both APs and district leaders who supervise APs. Why do APs feel like they are stuck? Is this intentional (are they satisfied with being a career AP), or do the participants feel like factors are limiting their own opportunities? I believe that the job of AP today is too difficult to intentionally want to remain a career AP, so given the nature of the work, I sought to examine the perceived barriers and obstacles that exist for these stuck APs.

Qualitative research allowed me to focus on in-depth interviews with assistant principals and examine, through their perceptions and experiences, the nature of their “stuckness” and, specifically, the reasons they were never selected for the principalship. To gather additional perspectives, I interviewed current and former principals and district officials to determine their perceptions regarding why some assistant principals are never able to achieve the principalship and their experiences with assistant principals who are stuck. Note: one AP participant (AP Barker) is a former principal, (retired from another state) and currently working as an AP; and another AP participant (Apple) was named a principal during the course of the study. In addition, the two focus groups also allowed me within the study to analyze the role of principals and district supervisors in supporting APs who want to get “unstuck” and obtain the principalship.

Research Questions

My overall research questions are included in Table 1 and include my rationale for each research question. In the next section, key concepts and terms are identified and defined for the purpose of clarifying these terms within the scope of my research.

Table 1

Research Questions and Rationale

Research Questions	Rationale
What are the perceptions of assistant principals as to why they have not or did not obtain the principalship (specifically reflecting on their past interviews, past experiences and events such as critical mistakes or lapses in judgment and other perceptions)?	The focus of the study centers on the perceptions and shared experiences of assistant principals. Ascertaining their thoughts on why opportunities have not been offered for promotion to the principalship is the center of the study.

Table 1

(Cont.)

Research Questions	Rationale
What shared experiences within the professional scope of assistant principals' daily work contribute to ascension to the principalship?	My personal experiences as an assistant principal, principal and district leader support that some specific job responsibilities promote quicker achievement of the principalship. Findings can support needed professional development and leadership growth programs within school districts to support AP needs.
What are the perceptions of principals and district level officials (who have worked with assistant principals) as to why assistant principals have not been promoted to the principalship?	My personal experiences at the district level support that perceptions of "right fit" as well as other judgmental and isolated observations influence the decision to promote assistant principals. Additionally, most principals and district level officials have also been APs; they can reflect and draw on their own personal experiences as an AP and their experiences with their former peers who were stuck also.

Key Concepts and Terms

The following terms are key to this study:

APs—Assistant Principals.

Life-long/Career APs—Individuals who have worked for more than three years as an assistant principal and who wanted to pursue the principalship, but were never given the opportunity.

Critical Mistakes—Major issues; errors in judgment; major events that factored into assistant principals never obtaining the principalship.

Discriminatory Practices—Discriminatory factors (such as racism, ageism, gender bias, etc.) that may be a factor in not obtaining the principalship.

Social Justice—Active focus on issues of equity, not merely equality. Providing those that have the greatest need, or experience the most bias, opportunity for equitable opportunities. Social justice leadership requires individuals (especially those of us who are members of the white male dominant culture) to recognize the role that privilege and power play in the continued oppression of marginalized groups of people. These marginalized groups can consist of any number of groups who are identified as being different or outside of the mainstream, who also lack the privilege and power that the members of the dominant culture possess.

Opportunity Costs—The impact of one's actions, decisions and choices as it relates to future opportunities and options.

Setting

The setting of this study included four school districts in the central piedmont of North Carolina. Region 5 districts (as determined by the regional Piedmont Triad Education Consortium) served as the local districts in which assistant principals work or have worked. This setting was geographically conducive for me as researcher, and it also provided for a diverse selection of district demographics including urban and rural settings in which I recruited participants. Despite the fact that the region included both rural and urban districts, only rural districts agreed to participate in this study. None of the participants in this study were from my home school district. This omission from my

district was purposeful, as I did not want any unnecessary bias or influence from my position to impact participant responses.

The actual research setting for interview locations in this study was based on individual preferences of the participants. Most preferred their individual offices; however, one preferred a more isolated setting of a book store. In order to ensure the comfort and maximize the potential for quality responses, I asked the participants to select their desired location for the interviews. I asked that the participants were mindful of the need for a setting that allowed for candid dialogue and minimal interruptions, so I emphasized that their personal school office may not be the best location, especially if the interview was to occur during normal school hours. All of the AP interviews occurred after school hours. All interview locations were located at the participant's work site with the exception of one AP who wanted to meet at a local bookstore. If the participants had preferred me to choose, I would have selected the local public library and reserved a research or conference room to ensure privacy and to reduce distractions. To build participant rapport and create a supportive and relaxed atmosphere, I spent typically 30 minutes just conversing with the participants about the current school year and how their school year was progressing. This seemed to relax the participants as it built positive rapport.

Participants

There were 17 total participants in this study (see Table 2). Eight participants were district leaders who supervise or have supervised APs and nine participants were APs. Seven of the nine AP participants were former or current assistant principals who

never obtained the position of principal. One participant was a current AP, but had recently retired from a neighboring state after serving more than 30 years as an educator, including six years as a principal. This individual had served for 10 years as an AP. Another AP was promoted to principal during the course of this research study. All nine APs had served as AP for at least three years. Each AP participant was interviewed individually.

Table 2

Participants

District	Name (Pseudonym)	Role	School Level
Axton County	Eric Oneil	Assistant Principal	Elementary
	Thomas Hill	Assistant Principal	High School
Liberty County	Mark Rogers	Superintendent	District
	Howard Adkins	Assistant Superintendent	District-Focus
	Alice Carlson	Director of Elementary	District-Focus
	Carolyn Carter	Director of Human Resources	District
	Barbara Ellis	Assistant Principal	High School
	Ron Barker	Assistant Principal	High School
Roanoke County	Elliot Roarke	Superintendent	District-Focus
	Elise Innis	Assistant Superintendent	District-Focus
	Norm Evans	Assistant Superintendent	District-Focus
	Carrie Jones	Executive Director—Elementary	District-Focus
	Lisa Moore	Assistant Principal	High School
	Holt Richards	Assistant Principal	High School
	Lori Owens	Assistant Principal	Elementary
Vernon County	Olivia Apple	Principal	Middle School
	Yvonne Nelson	Assistant Principal	Elementary

In addition, current district leaders who have supervised assistant principals and who have been involved in hiring and selection of principals were involved in either focus group or individual interviews. Each AP interview consisted of a 90-minute interview protocol. The focus group interviews consisted of approximately 120 minutes with district level supervisors who spoke to reasons why assistant principals were not promoted to the principalship. The participants within the focus groups also were represented from the Region 5 area and came from the same four districts as the AP participants. The district level leaders shared their perceptions as to why certain assistant principals are unable to ascend to the principalship and their experiences with assistant principals who are stuck. I would have liked a more diverse background that included more minority participants. Of the 17 participants, nine were females and eight were males. There were two African American participants. All required components of the IRB approval process were followed and documented.

Recruitment efforts consisted of contacting the Executive Director of the Piedmont Triad Education Consortium and seeking his assistance in communicating to the superintendents within this region. A description of the study and the target participants was provided as well as the approved IRB documents. The Executive Director sent an email to the superintendents and the assistant superintendents encouraging each district to consider participation in my study. I followed up with additional recruitment emails and correspondence. Four districts ultimately agreed to participate in the approved study. Each participant was provided consent forms and a description of the study which detailed their individual commitment (See Appendix A).

The criterion for selecting AP participants was discussed with my committee chair, and I decided to include APs who had been an AP for three years. APs who have only worked for three years may not truly be stuck in the position; however due to the difficulty in recruiting participants, I decided to use the three year experience threshold. After recruiting efforts produced only seven AP participants, I amended my IRB application to include another district, due to the lack of response from APs. The additional fourth district allowed me to add two participants to the study. In addition, in my experience working with APs, several who seek the principalship feel as if the AP position is a stepping stone, and if they do not achieve their goal quickly, the APs begin to have doubts and question when or if their opportunity may arise. APs see the churn of principal turnover creates many opportunities and vacancies. Rousmaniere (2013) discussed the challenge of the principalship position in her historical overview of the principalship. Rousmaniere examined the problem of principal scarcity and declared that the lack of qualified candidates creates a void in many urban districts, especially at the secondary levels. In addition, Rousmaniere (2013) discussed the shortage of women and minority candidates as well. Shortages of candidates combined with the complexities and challenges of the principalship have created a “crisis in the principal office” (Rousmaniere, 2006, p. 143). These challenges reinforce my perspective that if a principalship has not been obtained quickly, then it could mean that an AP is stuck.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of interviews of the selected participants in this study. The assistant principals were interviewed for approximately 90 minutes each to discuss

their experiences in the role of assistant principal as well as factors they believed may have contributed to them not obtaining a principalship. Six district level supervisors participated in two focus group interview sessions for approximately 120 minutes to discuss reasons why assistant principals were not promoted to principalships in their districts. In addition, two other district leaders participated in individual interviews consisting of approximately 90 minutes. The interview session with the assistant principals were designed to build rapport with the study participants, gather data on the specific roles of the individual as assistant principal, and set the stage for the second half of the interview in which more specific questioning regarding specific perceptions and feelings as to the factors that prohibited the assistant principals from obtaining the principalship.

The two focus groups consisted of a group of participants who were former principals and current district level supervisors, including superintendents, assistant superintendents and directors. The use of the focus groups allowed me to collect data from current leaders who supervise principals and APs. This insight provided timely and relevant information as to why some APs get stuck. The participants were able to elaborate on deficits that certain APs have or the particular issues that have delayed advancement to the principalship. The district level focus group also provided a broader perspective on AP advancement that included political motives, timing, and fit implications. Both focus groups were able to pull from their own experiences, as most had been principals and direct supervisors of APs. The focus group concept allowed for the collection of rich data, in an efficient, timely and effective manner. The group

dialogue was insightful and points made triggered lively discussion and specific examples used within this study.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. I also took observational field notes during the interviews to help guide follow up questions and identify emerging themes in the shared experiences of the participants. Interview questions were semi-structured, in that responses often led to other questions that provided additional insight. An interview protocol guided the interviews while still allowing for additional questions, probes, or follow up questions to be asked. The Data Collection Crosswalk (see Table 3) outlines my data collection process and the specific research and interview questions.

Table 3

Data Collection Crosswalk

Purpose Examine perceptions, themes, and common roles of assistant principals to identify the impact on obtaining the principalship?	
Research Questions (Three Research Questions)	Data Collection Strategies
1) What are the perceptions of assistant principals as to why they have not or did not obtain the principalship (specifically reflecting on their past interviews, past experiences, and events)?	Interview assistant principals
2) What shared experiences within the professional scope of assistant principals' daily work contribute to ascension to the principalship?	Interview assistant principals

Table 3

(Cont.)

<p>Interview Question Protocol—Assistant Principals</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Describe your daily responsibilities as an AP.2. How personally satisfied are you as an assistant principal?3. What are the positive experiences/aspects of being an assistant principal? Negative experiences/aspects?4. Do you feel that all APs have the same opportunity and experiences or are some activities reserved? (For example, late night supervision or athletics and buses for males, curriculum for females, etc.)?5. What experiences have you not had that you need to become principal? Describe any experiences that you were not afforded that you feel may have contributed to not being promoted to the principalship as of yet.6. How stressful is it to be a school administrator? Describe the most stressful times that you have experienced as an administrator.7. What role does school related stress and work load (long hours on the job) have on your personal health? On your desire to seek the principalship? How do you manage stress?8. Describe any skills or leadership traits you feel need further development that may contribute to being promoted to the principalship.9. Describe a defining moment that you feel was critical for your own professional promotion opportunities.10. Do you feel you were ever involved in a “Critical Mistake” as a result of your actions, your colleagues, or your principal? (Define critical mistake)11. How are APs hired in this district? What is the process for applying and interviewing for a principalship?12. What are some factors that go into hiring decisions? What are the determinants that factor into why a person is or is not hired for a position?

Table 3

(Cont.)

<p>Interview Question Protocol—Assistant Principals (cont.)</p> <p>13. How do you feel about the terms “right or best fit” vs. “the best candidate”? (Right fit, vs. best candidate (resume, experience, educational level)</p> <p>14. What factors do you feel were in place that contributed to you not being selected as principal?</p> <p>15. How might identity issues (e.g., gender, race, sexual identity, sexual preference, age, etc.) impact personal opportunities to advance to the principalship? To what extent do gender, race or other factors determine who is ultimately hired?</p> <p>16. Describe your thoughts on the ethical hiring practices of school districts in relation to discriminatory practices. (Define discriminatory practices.) Do districts discriminate?</p> <p>17. Have you experienced or witnessed any perceived discriminatory hiring practices within this district?</p> <p>18. How do social justice issues impact district hiring decisions such as student equity, concern for acceptance, and identifying privilege and power?</p> <p>19. How does your perceived social justice advocacy impact your potential as a principal in this district?</p> <p>20. What role does mentoring play in this district as a part of principal preparation?</p> <p>21. If you have a mentor, how would you describe your relationship? How has having a mentor impacted your leadership development?</p> <p>22. How do you feel about the term “Career AP”? (Define term)?</p> <p>23. Do you still want to become a principal (why or why not)?</p> <p>24. Why are you still an AP?</p> <p>25. What are your next professional steps or plans?</p>
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Table 3

(Cont.)

Research Questions (Three Research Questions)	Data Collection Strategies
3) What is the perspective of principals and/or district officials as to why assistant principals have not been promoted to the principalship?	Interview principals and district level supervisors (Focus Group and Individual Interviews)
<p>Interview Question Protocol—District Level Leaders (Focus Group)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please state your name and position within the district. 2. How are administrators (both principals and APs evaluated) by whom? 3. What district wide expectations do you set for your APs? 4. How are APs hired in this district? What is the process for applying and interviewing for a principalship? Who all is involved in the interviews? 5. What characteristics and qualities are needed to be a good assistant principal? How do you determine loyalty in an AP? 6. Are those same characteristics needed for principals? Are there other skills needed for the principalship? 7. What role does Social Justice, Equity, Diversity play into making hiring decisions? 8. Why do you feel that some assistant principals are not promoted to the principalship? 9. As an AP, have you felt stuck in the role? How does that feel and what does it mean to you to be stuck? 10. What can be done to get unstuck? What advice have you been given or would you provide to help someone get unstuck? 	

Table 3

(Cont.)

<p>Interview Question Protocol—District Level Leaders (Focus Group; cont.)</p> <p>11. What are some common mistakes that APs often make? Can you describe some specific actions, decisions or events that have hindered APs from moving to the principalship?</p> <p>12. How can APs overcome critical mistakes and incidents and what would the process and timeline be to overcome a critical mistake and develop into a principal?</p> <p>13. When hiring an AP, are you looking to fill an immediate need of AP, or are you looking for qualities and individuals who can become principals?</p> <p>14. How much does “the right fit” play in making hiring decisions? Do you want the right fit or the best candidate?</p> <p>15. What role does mentoring play in AP development within your district? Are present principals asked to mentor their APs, or are mentors assigned from outside?</p> <p>16. Describe the current leadership development programs you offer for APs or aspiring APs.</p> <p>17. How can districts better support APs as they develop and work toward the principalship?</p> <p>18. Any final thoughts?</p>

Data Analysis

The collection of data led to the next step, analysis. I used a transcription service to expedite the transcription of the interviews. To better familiarize myself with the data, I listened to the audio recordings several times during the interim period while I waited for the transcription process to be completed. After I received the transcriptions, I read the transcribed interviews while I listened to the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. I

used and referenced my observational notes that were recorded during the interview to begin to identify common themes and experiences. I used the coding software program dedoose to expedite my analysis and coding. The coding process included creating nodes or major categories that can be further filtered into specific concepts. Lichtman (2013) describes the coding process of data analysis as a lengthy process that requires the researcher to revisit the data and categories while consulting with the review of literature as well as the posed research questions. The purpose of the analysis was to find relationships between the data sources collected while looking for meaning and connections that supported my research questions.

I found dedoose to be user friendly and greatly helpful in the coding process. I uploaded each transcribed interview into dedoose and then the program's attributes allowed me to color code excerpts and create codes and themes. The program allowed me to number each line in the transcribed interviews to easily assist with tracking excerpts. I used open coding to identify 61 codes. I grouped codes using the process of axial coding and selective coding to narrow my focus to categories that consolidated the various codes. The 61 codes were further consolidated into seven final themes listed in alphabetical order: AP Development; AP Shared Daily Experiences and Responsibilities; Contentness/Willingness to Wait; District Hiring Practices; Experiences Needed for the Principalship; Faith, Purpose, and Place; Feedback to APs; Instructional Leadership; Mentors; Mistakes—Common or Critical; Negative Aspects of Being an AP; Next Level Leadership; Personal Barriers; Positive Aspects of Being an AP; Reflection; Relationship

with Principal; Right Fit; Rural District Mindset; Stuck; and Why APs Don't Become Principals.

Merriam (2002) summarized three types of coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding involved dissecting lines and paragraphs of interview responses looking for different phenomena and creating a word or phrase that captures each specific event. Open coding created numerous codes that must be condensed. Axial coding involved taking the many codes and grouping them into connected categories. Selective coding involved pulling categories together into a core category. Merriam (2002) detailed this as a process that pulls together the major themes that support—or question—the theory and research literature. The qualitative attributes of dedoose created a matrix of relevant and powerful codes. The codes could be viewed in a matrix table, a wordle model or also in a 3D bubble cloud. Each view included links to the number of connected excerpts that I selected during the analysis and this made the coding and consolidation a smooth process. The qualitative analysis features of dedoose also allowed me to combine and pull all excerpts from each participant into a word document that collected all quotes and passages that capture the essence of each selective code from each participant's view. After I combined the themes and codes, I created 20 documents named after my 20 major topics and pulled all excerpts together. From there I connected the thoughts and statements of the participants with their quotes and excerpts to create my results chapter. After feedback from my dissertation committee, member checks and peer reviews, seven final themes were finalized in the results chapter.

To member check, I shared the transcribed responses from the district leaders to gather their clarifications, additions, full approval and insights. I did not have any participants provide any clarification to the raw data collected. The data collected provided rich and descriptive details concerning the thoughts of the participants. I did not see any apparent gaps or missing pieces. I informed the participants that follow up interview sessions could be scheduled if needed; however, I was pleased with the amount and content of the collected data.

I originally planned to create a journal to track my results and record my reflections as I reviewed the collected raw data; however, the dedoose qualitative tools allowed me to create memos which aided in the discussion and results chapter of this study. Based on advice from my Chair, memoing was a component of the research, and it was made easy by the tools within dedoose. Memoing includes mapping research activities while collecting my thoughts as I analyzed the data. Memoing allows the researcher to extract meaning from the data; Maintaining momentum; and Opening communication (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). The process of memoing encourages and promotes strong engagement with the data and literature and allows the results to be easily interpreted based on the initial and ongoing investigation (Birks et al., 2008). As I read the transcripts, I created memos that allowed me to take notes and make connections to other participants. The tools within dedoose allowed me to upload all memos into a single document which aided in creation of the results chapter.

Trustworthiness

Subjectivity and Reflexivity

As the researcher who has experienced the role of assistant principal, principal and now district leader, I have experiences and perspectives from all levels. In addition, I have experienced working with assistant principal colleagues who were overlooked for principal positions, and I also have been in the position of principal who was hiring assistant principals. My experiences are also nuanced by and informed my own personal bias and assumptions. As a researcher, I challenged my assumptions and recognized that assumptions are based on opinion instead of fact. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) described reflexivity as maintaining an awareness of the role of the researcher and how he/she manages his/her own thoughts, feelings and position regarding the research. Merriam (2002) stressed that reflexivity requires one to be fully immersed in the data collection and analysis to better clarify how the researcher was able to arrive at specific findings and interpretations. Personal awareness is a critical component of reflexivity (Lichtman, 2013). I as researcher had to filter the data collected while interpreting the results, and I had to accept that the outcome would be subjective. The initial focus of my study was based on my belief that APs make critical mistakes; I recognized that assumption as I went into each interview. As I reviewed the data, I began to notice that one single critical mistake was not apparent in the comments from the participants; there were more examples of patterns of mistakes instead of a major critical or fatal mistake. This is a great example of how I as researcher needed to acknowledge the importance of reflexivity within this study.

Bracketing

Another critical component of qualitative research and phenomenology is the idea of bracketing. Lichtman (2013) described bracketing or epoché as setting aside our own personal thoughts and views as researcher to allow focus on the thoughts and perceptions of the subjects. Bracketing allows the researcher to identify the shared experiences of the subjects without undue influence from the researcher's personal attitudes and beliefs. Lichtman (2013) also stated that there is disagreement among researchers on the degree to which bracketing is possible, given that everyone is shaped by their own personal experiences and background. Lichtman (2013) supports "authentic reflection" which encourages the researcher to identify his/her own beliefs and assumptions regarding the specific phenomenon. Utilizing the rich and descriptive accounts from the participants allowed me to focus on the participants' views, which allowed for a more interesting study while applying thick description to the findings and results. I attempted to set aside my personal thoughts and views during the study; however, I also embraced the fact that despite not wanting to influence responses or the research, I have a tremendous amount of real application in the area of school administration and my experiences did influence my desire to pursue this topic and it also maintained my interest in the topic throughout the study.

Transparency and Transferability

Given the nature of this qualitative study, I focused on the transferability of information gathered, instead of attempting to generalize the results to other settings. With 17 total participants from four rural districts, I am aware that results of the study

cannot create generalizations about the greater pool of APs who find themselves stuck or with limited opportunities for advancement to the principalship. However, the findings of the study do provide insights into APs working in rural school districts and the daily work of APs. To ensure trustworthiness within this study, I was transparent throughout this research study. I shared with participants my current role as a school district leader as well as some of my experiences working with APs in the past. I attempted to fully explain the purpose of the study while allowing participants to decide if they wished to participate. Informing participants that I would be interviewing multiple individuals in search of varied perspectives was important as well. In addition, I made it clear to the AP participants that although I would be interviewing district leaders in their school district, I would not share or discuss any of the specific information that the AP participants shared during the interviews.

Member Checking

Member checking was a critical component to ensure trustworthiness. Member checking allows the participants to review the data as well as the researcher's interpretation of comments and interviews (Merriam, 2002). The transcribed interviews as well as notes were shared with the participants as part of the member-checking process. If participants felt that their original comments were misconstrued or not fully understood, they had the opportunity to provide feedback, additions, or clarification of the data. Participants were sent an email with a member check form (see Appendix D) in which they could request their pseudonym. Each participant was provided this information and was asked to return any feedback or comments within one month of

receipt of the results chapter. Although I did receive individual responses, I did not receive any feedback that required changes, clarifications, or omissions to the results chapter. In this study, I informed participants that findings will be used in my position as a district leader to improve principal preparation and leadership programs also. This information also promoted trustworthiness as several district leaders also were anxious to see the results so they could examine their own practices with their APs.

Peer Review

Peer reviews were also utilized to ensure trustworthiness. Peer Reviews involve colleagues agreeing to read and review the research study findings and the raw data to ensure the interpreted results appear consistent with the data and credible. Merriam (2002) suggested peer reviewers can be colleagues who have extensive knowledge of the research focus or someone with limited knowledge. There could be benefits to both; however, in this study I asked two colleagues to serve as peer reviewers. I asked two fellow current district level supervisors who have been an AP as well as a principal. The two peer reviewers that I used have also been involved in educational research and are working toward or have obtained their doctorate degree. I asked the peer reviewers to review chapters of my research to identify possible gaps and issues that I may have missed. Through member checking and peer review, this study has maintained transparency of the entire data collection and interpretation process.

Benefits and Risks

The potential benefits to the participants in this study were varied based on the individual groups interviewed. Assistant principals may have benefited from the

dialogue, discussion and reflection on the topic. The opportunity for assistant principals to reflect on their prior mistakes and situations in which they would change the outcome had implications in which these major events and/or decisions could be viewed as learning opportunities. These APs who are still practicing as assistant principals were able to reflect and hopefully address needed areas of improvement in hope of possibly receiving additional opportunities for promotion. The principal and district office participants may have benefited from the reflection also. Principals and district leaders can shape opportunities for assistant principals in their schools. Principals can help assistant principals to overcome critical mistakes, provide additional leadership opportunities and mentor assistant principals. District leaders could redesign their own leadership development programs to address some of the challenges and pitfalls that could potentially derail assistant principals.

The risks associated with this study were primarily centered with assistant principal participants. Assistant principals who are currently still employed may have felt reluctant to fully open up for fear of repercussions. Assistant principals who felt that discriminatory actions have been in place could have perceived some risk for speaking out. The same would be true for principals and district level leaders who spoke out on practices that may have been discriminatory. In addition, assistant principals may also have felt embarrassed in discussing the fact that they have not been able to ascend to the principalship. Scheduling extended interview sessions with APs allowed me as the researcher to build rapport with the assistant principals during the extended session and

then delve deeper into their thoughts and perceptions during the second half of the interview.

The themes and experiences shared by the participants have led to recommendations for addressing possible perceptions of injustices in the hiring process. The analysis also created growth opportunities for districts, principals and assistant principals to develop the leadership potential of future aspiring assistant principals through recommendations regarding assistant principalship development. This research also contributed to certain gaps in educational leadership research pertaining to assistant principals. As stated earlier, the majority of educational leadership research focuses on the principalship. This research provides insights regarding the development and needs of assistant principals. Also this study allows others to view the role of the assistant principal from three perspectives: the AP, the principal, and district leadership. Triangulating these views will better make sense of the phenomenon of being stuck in the assistant principalship and can be used to inform assistant principal professional development.

Limitations

The limitations of this study lie in the ability to generalize findings to other situations involving the lack of promotion opportunities for assistant principals. Due to the limited number of assistant principal participants and the limited number of rural districts who participated in the study, findings cannot be generalized beyond the scope of the study. This fact coupled with the limited amount of research that focuses on assistant principal promotion and factors that limit promotion, made this study difficult to

fully extend the findings outside of the context of this study. However, this study did investigate the concept of AP stuckness and offer recommendations for APs, districts and leadership preparation programs to prevent stuckness and/or assist APs in getting unstuck. Other limitations of the study included my role as assistant superintendent, which could be viewed as intimidating to AP participants. Some participants may have felt embarrassed or ashamed of being considered stuck in the position. Admitting stuckness to an assistant superintendent could create anxiety for participants who are seeking principal opportunities. A final limitation was the lack of diversity within the study and the absence of any urban school districts, which could have shed additional insight into the area of Career APs, as well as the concept of stuckness in an urban setting.

CHAPTER IV

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: PERCEIVED BARRIERS LIMITING
ASCENSION TO THE PRINCIPALSHIP**

Introduction

The data for this qualitative study were collected using a semi-structured interview protocol for principals and district level leaders. The questions provided a starting point for conversations and reflection. There were 17 participants in this study: nine assistant principals (one of which was named a principal during the study), two superintendents, three assistant superintendents, two directors of elementary programs, and one director of human resources. There were two focus group interviews consisting of the district level leaders and eleven individual interviews for a total of 13 interviews consisting of over twenty hours of raw data. Participants who were part of a focus group interview are identified as focus group participants in the data analysis.

An initial analysis of the data resulted in over 60 codes that were compiled into seven themes that assisted with answering the three research questions. Each of the seven themes will be discussed in this chapter. Major themes that developed from the research were next level leadership; the need for-or lack of-assistant principal development; experiences needed for the principalship; mistakes—common or critical; district hiring practices; contentment; and disincentives to the principalship. This chapter will begin with an overview of the participants of the study and then will focus on the major themes that developed from the project.

Participants

Participants in this study came from four school systems: Axton County, Liberty County, Roanoke County, and Vernon County. All four districts are rural districts, and the findings and responses of each participant were most likely influenced by the rural context.

Axton County Schools

Axton County Schools can be found in the central region of the state and is home to over 60,000 residents. The school district is home to over 8,000 students and has twenty schools. The district is within a 50-mile radius of over 25 colleges, universities, and technical schools. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the demographic make-up of Axton County is as follows: White 71.4%, Black 13.1%, and Hispanic 12.8%. The median household income is \$57,091 and 12.4% live below poverty level. Axton County is above the state average in household income. The county has seen an 8.2% population increase over the last four years (2014 US Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/en.html>).

Eric Oneil—Assistant Principal, Elementary. AP Oneil, a white male, is currently in his third year at his current elementary school as assistant principal. He previously served four years as a high school assistant principal and prior to that one year as an assistant principal at an early college. Including his one-year internship, AP Oneil has nine years of experience as an assistant principal. Mr. Oneil was a music major in undergraduate school, and he has a great love and support for all arts programs. AP Oneil has a doctorate in educational administration and he wants to be a principal;

however, he is now very selective as to the type of school he wants. He has a desire to be at the secondary level, but he has not had the opportunity to obtain a secondary school principalship.

Thomas Hill—Assistant Principal, High School. AP Hill is a white male who is currently in his second year as the assistant principal at Axton County High School. He previously served one year as a middle school assistant principal in a neighboring district. AP Hill previously taught at his present school for fifteen years and he has returned to his school where his daughter also attends as a junior. AP Hill has two masters' degrees and he is working on his doctorate in education administration and leadership. Mr. Hill is also a National Board Certified Teacher and he comes from a family of educators that includes his wife who is a guidance counselor, parents who were principals and siblings who are in education, including a brother who is a superintendent. AP Hill is in his late forties and he worries that he may have waited too late to get into administration. AP Hill has a lot of confidence and he knows he will be a great principal.

Liberty County Schools

Liberty County Schools can be found in the north central region of the state and it is home to over 20,000 residents. The school district is home to over 2,500 students and has six schools. The county is primarily an agricultural area consisting of farmland, but it is within an hour drive of three major cities. According to the United States Census Bureau, the demographic make-up of Liberty County is as follows: White 61.2%, Black 33.5%, and Hispanic 3.6%. The median household income is \$35,315 and 22.6% live below poverty level. Liberty County is well below the state average in household income

(by \$11,000). The county has seen a -2.7% population decrease over the last four years (2014 US Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/en.html>).

Mark Rogers—Superintendent, Liberty County Schools. Dr. Mark Rogers, a white male, is the superintendent of Liberty County Schools. Dr. Rogers has been the superintendent here for two years. He has been a superintendent in 4 other districts serving a total of fourteen years as a school superintendent. Dr. Rogers has a lot of experience; however, in his current role he has had trouble attracting candidates to his rural district. Dr. Rogers believes strongly in understanding the community's needs and wants when it comes to hiring principals to lead schools. Dr. Rogers also believes that given the right circumstances, there is an opportunity for every assistant principal to become a successful principal.

Howard Adkins—Assistant Superintendent, Liberty County Schools (Focus Group). Dr. Howard Adkins, a white male, is the assistant superintendent of Liberty County Schools. Dr. Adkins has over 30 years of experience with the majority of his experience coming from another state. Dr. Adkins has been a teacher, assistant principal (for over nine years) and a principal at all levels. In addition, he has served in director roles and assistant superintendent roles for several years also. Dr. Adkins has a lot of practical experience, and that translates into his desire to support and assist all administrators along their path.

Alice Carlson—Director of Elementary Programs (Focus Group). Alice Carlson, a Caucasian female, is the director of elementary programs for Liberty County Schools. Ms. Carlson is a native of Liberty County, and she has spent the majority of her

career working for the district. Ms. Carlson was an assistant principal for two years before serving in her current role. Ms. Carlson previously wanted to move into the central office; however, she was informed that she needed secondary administrative experience before moving to the district office. Ms. Carlson was reluctant, but she did agree to serve as an AP at the district middle school and soon after was hired at the district level, despite never serving as a principal. Ms. Carlson serves in an informal mentoring and support role for administrators in her district.

Nota Bene: Dr. Adkins and Ms. Carlson served on a focus group panel together for their participation in this study.

Carolyn Carter—Director of Human Resources. Carolyn Carter, an African American female, is the current director of human resources in Liberty County Schools. Ms. Carter is a native of Liberty County having started her career as a substitute teacher in the district. Ms. Carter was an elementary and middle school teacher for several years before becoming an assistant principal at the district middle school. Ms. Carter was overlooked multiple times as she applied for principal positions within her district; however, after some time she was promoted to the director of testing and soon after was promoted to the director of human resources.

Barbara Ellis—Assistant Principal, High School. Barbara Ellis, a white female, is a current assistant principal at Liberty County High School. She has eighteen years in education and has served as AP for three years at this school, including a brief time spent as the interim principal of the school. Ms. Ellis is divorced with two school age children. Ms. Ellis was a former elementary teacher and elementary media

coordinator. She has obtained National Board Certification and has two masters' degrees. Ms. Ellis sees herself as a natural leader and has a love for instructional leadership. Ms. Ellis is certain that she does not want to be a principal at a high school; however, she is very much interested in a principalship at the elementary level.

Ron Barker—Assistant Principal, Middle School. Ron Barker, an African American male, has over 34 years of experience in education, with all but one year in another state. Mr. Barker retired from that state and he is the current assistant principal at a middle school in the district. Mr. Barker has been a high school teacher, coach, assistant principal (for nine years), principal (for nine years) and now finds himself an assistant principal again. Mr. Barker has an interesting story regarding his own personal challenges and a setback within his years as an administrator. Mr. Barker is currently happy in his role of assistant principal and he does not anticipate serving as principal again.

Roanoke County Schools

Roanoke County School can be found in the Northwestern region of the state, and it is home to over 70,000 residents. The school district has over 8,000 students and has twenty schools. The county has a diverse economy that includes agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. According to the United States Census Bureau, the demographic make-up of Roanoke County is as follows: White 84.3%, Black 4.1%, and Hispanic 10.1%. The median household income is \$35,641 and 19.9% live below poverty level. Roanoke County is well below the state average in household income (by

\$10,000). The county has seen an -1.0% population decrease over the last four years (2014 US Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/en.html>).

Lisa Moore—Assistant Principal, High School. Lisa Moore, a white female, is an assistant principal at a high school in the district. AP Moore has eleven years of education experience and she served as an exceptional children's teacher previously. Ms. Moore has extensive experience serving special needs populations. Ms. Moore has five years' experience as an assistant principal and she wants to become a principal. Ms. Moore has experienced personal struggles and resentment in her current role, but she is optimistic for her future.

Holt Richards—Assistant Principal, High School. Holt Richards is a white male, who has sixteen years' experience in education. His background has all been at the high school level. Mr. Richards found success as a basketball coach and teacher in his early career, and that led him to administration. However, Mr. Richards has been at his current position as assistant principal for eight years. He does not enjoy his job, and he feels like he has been passed over for some positions due to local politics. Mr. Richards wants to be a principal, but he is not sure what else he needs to do at this point in his career.

Lori Owens—Assistant Principal, Elementary School. Lori Owens is a white female who has been an assistant principal for five years at the elementary level. Ms. Owens has three small children, and she has a background that allows her to empathize with others who struggle but not sympathize. Ms. Owens was a single parent for a period of time and lived in poverty. She understands the challenges that those obstacles bring,

but she is determined to find success. She has had instructional leadership roles in her previous positions and she wants to continue her love for instructional leadership as a principal. Ms. Owens understands the value of having a positive and trusting relationship with her principal, as she has experiences where she was split and served two schools as AP during the year. Trust was not present at one school and that took a toll on Ms. Owens.

The following individuals served on a focus group panel for the Roanoke County School District.

Elliot Roarke—Superintendent, Roanoke County Schools (Focus Group).

Dr. Roarke is a white male who is the superintendent of the school district. He coined the phrase #nextlevelleadership. Dr. Roarke believes that assistant principals should view their daily activities as an ongoing job interview. What one does today is an actual reflection of their future success as a principal.

Elise Innis—Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke County Schools (Focus Group). Dr. Innis is a white female who oversees curriculum and instruction in the district. She works closely with assistant principals in the district's AP Leadership Academy. Dr. Innis looks for assistant principals who are willing to show initiative within their current role.

Norm Evans—Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke County Schools (Focus Group). Dr. Evans is a white male who is the assistant superintendent of student support services. He interacts with assistant principals and principals and acts as a district contact for parent concerns. Dr. Evans's personal experience with disappointment in not getting

a position is a great message for assistant principals aspiring to be principals. One's response to disappointment is key to making progress on the career ladder.

Carrie Jones—Executive Director, Roanoke County Schools (Focus Group).

Carrie Jones is a white female. Ms. Jones is the executive director of elementary programs, and although she works with administrators on a daily basis, she is the only participant in the study to have never been an assistant principal or principal.

Vernon County Schools

Vernon County Schools can be found in the west central region of the state, and it is home to over 40,000 residents. The school district has over 6,000 students and has twelve schools. The county has a primarily agricultural base; however, it is closely connected to a major interstate route which is bringing additional business opportunities to the area. According to the United States Census Bureau, the demographic make-up of Vernon County is as follows: White 84.9%, Black 6.5%, and Hispanic 6.4%. The median household income is \$50,139 and 13.4% live below poverty level. Vernon County is above the state average in household income. The county has seen a 0.5% population increase over the last four years (2014 US Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/en.html>).

Olivia Apple—Assistant Principal, Elementary (Current Middle School Principal). Olivia Apple, white female, served as an assistant principal in Vernon County for five years. Ms. Apple served four years as an elementary AP and over a year as a middle school AP. During the course of this project, Ms. Apple was promoted to principal at a district middle school. Ms. Apple has a strong background in instructional

leadership, and she served in the NC Principals Fellows Program as well. Ms. Apple is excited to have achieved her goal of the principalship.

Yvonne Nelson—Assistant Principal, Elementary. Yvonne Nelson is a white female with over sixteen years' experience in education—all at the elementary level. Ms. Nelson served in various roles as teacher, curriculum coach and assistant principal for one principal for twelve years (with two of those twelve years as an AP) within an at-risk school in a large district that served 99% free and reduced meal students. Ms. Nelson has moved from the urban district to rural Vernon County to assume an AP role. She has been an assistant principal for a total of three years. She has experienced great frustration with the managerial aspects of her job, especially when her love is instructional leadership. Ms. Nelson believes the right opportunity will come for her as she seeks to become a principal.

Themes from the Research

An analysis of the data produced seven major themes: next level leadership; the need for-or lack of-assistant principal development; experiences needed for the principalship; mistakes—common or critical; district hiring practices; contentment; and disincentives to the principalship. These themes help to answer one or more of the following research questions: What are the perceptions of assistant principals as to why they have not or did not attain the principalship?; What shared experiences within the scope of assistant principals' daily work contribute to ascension to the principalship?; and What are the perceptions of principals and district level officials as to why assistant

principals have not been promoted to the principalship? In this section, each theme and the connection to the research question will be discussed.

The Importance of Exhibiting Next Level Leadership

It is important to understand the perceptions of district leaders on what skills APs need to demonstrate in order to attain a principalship. Once skills are identified and understood, barriers to attaining the principalship become more evident. This theme is important as district leaders are the gatekeepers to the principalship and are situated to limit the possibilities of APs in attaining next level leadership. This section helps to address research question three, district perspectives as to why APs have not attained the principalship. Areas that will be explored are decision-making; district expectations; focus on instructional leadership; initiative; risk-taking; soft skills; and the power of perception.

I mean there's leadership and then there's what I would say, there's #nextlevel leadership and that, moving from AP to principal is next level leadership and that's everything from the way you blow your nose to the way you walk down the hallway to the way you handle that sensitive, political situation with that lawyer who's a parent or that doctor who's a parent to the custodian who you've got to talk to in a totally different way, or that parent that walks in that you know they're poor and they can't spend the money to send them on a trip, I mean it's, the range of leadership from—in a principal's job is just, it's enormous and you've got to be able to, you know, situational leadership, you've got to be able to change, you can't expect them to, them to change to you, so you have to change to meet whatever the leadership need is for that school and I think sometimes our APs are just, they're so one way, they can't be flexible enough to understand I gotta be this way here, this way here, and this way here. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Superintendent Roarke from Roanoke County identified what district leaders want as they search for APs who are ready to become a principal. Next level leadership is

more than a hashtag tweet that Superintendent Roarke uses. It is how he determines his hiring decisions. Roarke referenced situational leadership and he described how APs should view every day as a job interview; especially in his district. Roarke is watching and listening every day to see how APs handle and address situations. These everyday interviews help him identify who he feels is ready for the next step.

AP Nelson, who served under a particularly strong principal for over 12 years as a teacher and AP in a highly impacted school, can identify with Superintendent Roarke's next level leadership. She recognized the importance and impact of a dynamic principal. Next level leaders maintain a focus on current trends, and embrace research as Nelson stated below.

Principals can really, really change the whole dynamics of a school in that a school that could be very complacent, that's very much stuck in the old—a person can come in and if they do it right, they can change the whole face of that school to bring them to—up to speed, you know, more modern, making sure that we're doing, being current with our teaching, doing research, reading more, you know, being more up to date and I think that's huge in a rural county. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

As AP Nelson stated above, APs recognize the impact a highly effective principal can have on a school. The APs in this project all feel like they can have a positive impact on a school. The APs still want to obtain that next level of school leadership, even though some are in danger of becoming a career AP. District leaders expressed that APs who lack next level leadership skills struggle to attain the principalship.

Decision making. The ability to make effective and sound decisions is often overlooked when APs think about their own development. However, decision making

was a topic that district leaders discussed often regarding what they look for in potential principals. Superintendent Roarke discussed how situations and reactions to situations can ruin an AP's potential for a promotion to the principalship.

APs are put in some really precarious situations and the wrong situation can ruin an AP, but it just, you know, the AP's got to be on their toes to know and recognize that and navigate it to the best of their ability. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Superintendent Rogers of Liberty County has 15 years' experience as a superintendent. Rogers stated that while curriculum knowledge is important, the most important component to being a successful principal involved sound decision making practices. Rogers also acknowledged that communication is critical in being able to effectively communicate your reasoning and rationale in your decision.

Curriculum knowledge, while we ask that, it's not imperative to me, I feel like we can teach them that, it's really adaptability and being able to understand certain things to build a—have good reasoning skills when it comes down to it, to have good logic and to you know, be able to communicate that, it's a lot when you're doing the interview process is how are they communicating with you, because if they can't communicate with you in the interview, then it probably prohibits them from communicating at their school too. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

As a new principal, Participant Apple has learned that she has the benefit of time in making decisions. She has learned that there are very few decisions that require an immediate decision. Apple learned from excellent principal role models during her five years as an elementary AP before becoming principal. She can gather input and ask questions to make sure she is making the best decision moving forward.

I'm learning that if I stick to what my priorities are and what I think is right and I, I take time, I think that's one of the biggest things I'm learning as a principal is I don't have to make decisions right now, I don't have to do everything right in this second. I can take time and just be methodical about things and people are okay with that. I think that helps me not stress as much. (Olivia Apple, Principal, Vernon)

The impact of decision making is further discussed by Superintendent Roarke.

He described an incident involving an AP's reaction to a student wearing a shirt with a Bible verse on it. This type of decision making gave Roarke an indication of how this AP may react in the role of principal. Roarke believed that the AP took an extreme stance with a simple t-shirt and Bible verse; this event is vividly recalled by Roark, which indicated the impact it had on his perception of this AP.

A kid wears a John 3:16 shirt and you tell them to take it off, that's, that says a lot about your judgment and the principal wasn't on campus so then it says something about your decision making, why didn't you call? So there was nothing wrong with the shirt, there's nothing, so that potential situation could have turned into a media frenzy, national media, censorship, you know, religious advocates and but yeah, that was a big mistake. I mean that's just—that's you inside their brain for just a split second and okay, it may not be a John 3:16 shirt, it may be something more serious. Decision making happens every single day and we, you know, you gauge and gather input every time you walk into a building, every time you interact, every time you're at a meeting with—you're building a resume with your colleagues every interaction you have and so yeah, I mean we're—none of us are perfect, but this person had enough experience, she should have known to call, check in, but it was just a lapse. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

District-specific expectations. District leaders establish what they expect from their principals and APs. Adherence to these expectations can determine when and if you are considered for principalships. In Roanoke County, the district provides an entry plan

for their principals that serves as a checklist for what the district feels will create successful principals.

When I first came here we moved, I moved nine principals and upset the applecart, but they were all really good moves and so I didn't want my principals to have any questions as far as what I expected so I created an entry plan into their school and it's a detailed, three-week, six, three-month, six-month, everything, a checklist for them to do to complete as they enter this new school and I think that has been hugely successful in these principal transitions. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Superintendent Rogers expects that principals and APs have integrity. He sees integrity as an essential trait that identifies next level leadership in his eyes.

Probably more than anything else would be the integrity, then the ability to work with others and, you know, the ability to do the job, that, you know, just the—do you feel like they're capable of actually performing the task at hand. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

Human Resource Director Carter from Liberty County emphasized the importance of schools following their strategic plans and how those plans should support students. The failure to adhere to district expectations can hinder opportunities for the principalship.

Students are our number one priority, making sure that, you know, we have things in place as far as initiatives and they have all the necessary resources that they need to, you know, meet the needs of all the students, and of course they're following their strategic plans and they are sharing that information with the school board and doing follow ups and when, you know, as they progress on and they're meeting their goals, but basically, you know, they're taking care of the necessary responsibilities of what they're supposed to do in the building level and they report back to the superintendent. (Carolyn Carter, Director of Human Resources, Liberty)

If districts set goals and expectations for their administrators and clearly communicate them, then the APs know what the district leadership is looking for in their APs and principals. These expectations allow APs to focus their own personal development along the areas that the district places value. Another major expectation is the focus on instructional leadership. As stated earlier, instructional leadership is a given expectation of principals and it is a visible way to demonstrate next level leadership to the district.

Focus on instructional leadership. Roanoke County district participants emphasized the importance of instructional leadership through their comments. Roanoke is the largest district in this study, and as a result they have more curriculum and instruction support staff that can provide the needed emphasis on instruction. Assistant Superintendent Innis leads the curriculum and instruction department in Roanoke County. Innis discussed steps that Roanoke County has taken to ensure instructional leadership is a priority, including the creation of school executive positions that combine the role of instructional specialists with assistant principal roles.

We focus on curriculum and curriculum and instructional leadership, so my direct relationship with them is based on their performance in that area, so I think that's—part of that protocol is that our expectation that they become instructional leaders in their schools. (Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)
We converted positions from instructional specialists to—we call them executives in the elementary with the idea that they're gonna be instructional in technology and assistant principal and all, wear all that hat, but they were, their job was redesigned at a time when we didn't have the luxury to have both. (Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

Elementary Director Jones was a member of the Roanoke County focus group and shared the district's expectation that classroom walkthroughs are occurring each week. Walkthroughs require administrators to provide feedback to teachers and suggestions for improving classroom instruction.

Our superintendent, Dr. Roarke sets the expectation that there's a minimum of 15 a week for them and those walkthroughs contain the look fors that we want to see in our classrooms. (Carrie Jones, Elementary Director, Roanoke)

Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Support Services in Roanoke County Evans also discussed the creation of an AP Academy that focused on instructional leadership and not just information sharing. These opportunities provided leadership experiences for APs to refine their instructional leadership skills.

I was gonna say one of our reasons for going to that different format (changing principal meetings and developing an AP Academy) that's become you know more teaching than just going through lists of things and requirements is for us to model that for our school leaders and with the hope that they take that same kind of approach to their faculty meetings and you want to talk about a great chance for an assistant principal to shine as a school leader, to lead a group though some of the kinds of things that Dr. Innis and Ms. Jones lead us through in the mornings at our leadership team meetings, a great opportunity for our APs to have that opportunity to step out of that role of manager and into leader. (Norm Evans, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

AP Oneil is a current elementary AP of nine years and a former music teacher. He also recognized that district leaders are looking for instructional leaders who are not only strong in curriculum areas, but also have the ability to build relationships and rapport. A truly well rounded leader is necessary to be a principal.

I think superintendents want the same thing, they want someone that is gonna be a strong instructional leader because test scores are a major reality in this day and time especially with the new school grading system. They want someone that can, that is truly a leader, a transforming leader, not just, you know, a manger or you know, the supervisor, they want someone that is, has good rapport with parents, that's gonna build relationships within the community, that, you know, that's gonna be a team player, and someone that's gonna represent the district well. (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton)

District leaders assume their future principals are going to be instructional leaders; it was implied from all district leaders, that principals would be instructional leaders. As a result, there is emphasis on instructional leadership and the ability to lead and help others grow in this area. District officials do admit that sometimes with APs who have been an AP for some years, they seem to have less instructional leadership skills than those that are hired more quickly. Effective instructional leaders also need to be competent at relationship building. Districts are seeking individuals who have the soft skills necessary to lead and grow others. This supports the fact that instructional leadership is a given expectation in hiring for these roles.

We've interviewed and in curriculum knowledge, instructional knowledge, it comes down to —sometimes these APs who have been in these roles longer have less curriculum knowledge, less instructional knowledge, and that is very evident in the interview. (Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

Initiative. Superintendent Roarke thinks initiative is a critical component in demonstrating next level leadership. Initiative can be identified in the APs who volunteer to lead, or assume certain responsibilities, and who are active participants in professional learning communities (PLCs).

The leadership in me shows up, you know, if you really want to be a principal you're gonna try to learn every avenue of the principalship and being an administrator, so whether it's going, becoming the testing coordinator and becoming the best testing coordinator I can be to get that right and taking that responsibility very, very seriously to when I'm leading a PLC meeting, I'm not gonna just blow it off. I'm not gonna go to sit through that meeting and say check, I've got this checked off, but I actually want to be a part of the process and to learn, so I can think of people in my mind right now that are, could—are teetering right there, maybe want to be a principal but don't show that type of initiative in every situation. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Superintendent Rogers also acknowledged the active participation of APs and their willingness to volunteer, whether that is game duty supervision or any other duty required of APs.

I think that's a large part of it, you, you know, you can tell who's at ball game duty and who's doing the—a couple of things, and I think that adds to their opportunity to become a principal. I think they kind of—they demonstrate that they probably deserve it more than, that they should do it, they just kind of, they're that type person and you kind of acknowledge that. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

Assistant Superintendent Adkins from Liberty County shared insights from 30 plus years of experiences working with APs as he discussed the need for an AP to make sure others see his or her work. Being visible and making a name for your self is important.

Well I was just going to say, I think an AP needs to become visible, they need to take on some leadership, they need to be presenter, to make a name for themselves. But not do it at the sake of the leader. Not to overshadow, the principal, but they need to catch the eye of those who make the decisions. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

AP Moore from Roanoke County has been an AP for five years as an elementary and high school AP. Although she experienced an unexpected move to the high school after questioning a hiring decision of a custodian, AP Moore still has a goal of being an Exceptional Children Director. APs that have goals and ambitions are more likely to work to achieve their goals. However, AP Moore indicated there is a limit to her ambition. She does not see herself as a ladder climber. She knows that there are APs who take their work home and work all hours of the night.

Other APs also acknowledged that some APs go above and beyond, and it is in hope of being recognized. AP Richards has been a high school AP in Roanoke County for eight years. He has certainly experienced frustrations, and he now feels resentment toward the AP position. AP Richards discussed his unwillingness to take initiative with curriculum as he told of an experience where an individual was sharing a well-designed lesson plan, but one that would have taken hours to develop. This lesson plan was recognized and the individual also for her work. However, AP Richards indicated that is not something he is willing to do.

Alright, I mean it was a phenomenal lesson, with all the and she slid all of her apple slices over where it fit in the lesson plan and that person asked a realistic, legitimate question and that person, because they asked that question was labeled as lazy at that point, alright, so I only say that to say the person that developed this lesson plan and went before, that went before the rest of the faculty in that school or the rest of the district in the biology PLC, she has an advantage, now she did create that advantage, I understand that but she now, to answer your question, she now has an advantage, [Right.] but I do think that sometimes we can choose, I can choose to create those opportunities or I can choose to turn my back on those opportunities, if that answers your question. I'm not gonna call over to the central office ten times to the director of curriculum ten times to be sure I've got it right. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

Even though there are APs who are not willing to go the extra mile, district leaders are looking to see who is. Assistant Superintendent Innis shared an example of an AP who has been willing to grow and develop. Originally the AP was not receptive to feedback, but he has embraced working and learning from his new principal.

Another example I have in my head is an assistant principal who probably wants to be on a fast track to being a principal and just needs to slow down and stop and learn. I have to put that back on the assistant principal of do you want to grow, and what opportunities are you making for yourself in order to learn. (Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

AP Owens has been an AP in Roanoke County for five years. Owens has experienced the challenge of being a single parent living in poverty, so she values the importance of taking advantage of opportunities. Owens is showing initiative by leading district wide School Net training on the use of data.

I am one of five people, one of five other assistant principals who is helping with some curriculum reshaping in our district, I also led a district-wide training earlier in the year about power schools and the use of School Net and using data for that, I continue to push that and using School Net more effectively in our classrooms, I've been doing a lot of that this morning, so for me it's still doing that type of thing, of saying these are the things that I'm putting forward and I don't do that necessarily for the accolades but those are still the right things to do, School Net is still the right thing to do, and for the right thing for teachers to use. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

AP Oneil volunteered to be on a committee to review the district code of conduct regulations. From this committee other networking and professional development opportunities have developed based on the group's initiative.

I volunteered to be on a review committee, we're a review panel to look at the district code of conduct. In my previous district I got on a task force to look at professional development opportunities for assistant principals, and what we did there is we kind of developed a book club so to speak where we kind of narrowed the list down to about three or four books, one of them was *Dealing with Difficult Parents*, data, different things, and we would read one book a month and then we would discuss it as a group. (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton)

AP Ellis, who is in her third year as AP at the only high school in Liberty County is taking advantage of opportunities to work with Advanc-Ed in the accreditation process of schools. In addition, as a high school AP who previously taught at the elementary level, she offered to be the site coordinator for the third grade reading camp also. This is a great example of initiative and I am sure it is being noticed at the district level.

I was asked to be a lead evaluator, I was asked to go through that training this past summer and be a lead evaluator for Advanc-Ed, well actually, I hadn't thought about this, but the past two summers I have been the site coordinator for the summer school program at the third-grade level because of my elementary experience and because nobody else wanted to do it, and the principal at the school didn't want to do it, so I did do that so that's going outside of my school, and I kind of did that willingly. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

APs who are willing to take initiative are demonstrating next level leadership. These opportunities should prove beneficial in the future promotion chances for these individuals. However, those APs that are not seeking additional opportunities are also sending a message to district leadership. However, it may not be a message that will get these APs to the principalship; instead it may ensure that the APs remain stuck in their current position.

Calculated risk taking. Superintendent Roarke also sees the ability to take calculated risks as an important indicator of principal readiness. The ability to think outside the box and act on the risk requires confidence from an AP as well.

I like risk takers, but you know a risk taker as an AP it's different than as a principal, so you know, I guess there's some maturity, some growth, you know, I like people who are willing to push the envelope as a principal but yet within the boundaries that we are in confines of what we're doing within the system, that's just me personally, to testing and accountability folks, they wanted to follow all the rules. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

AP Hill has been an AP for three years, and he is confident that he has the ability to lead a school today. Hill has national board certification, and he called himself a strong teacher. Hill also comes from a long line of educators. I would characterize AP Hill as a risk taker and one that would fit into Roarke's definition of risk taker who demonstrates next level leadership.

The bottom line is I think I can walk right into whatever meeting and talk about instruction and hold my own and lead. I think I can sit down with a group of people and build consensus around whatever generic type of issue that we're wanting to create. (Thomas Hill, AP, Axton)

AP Hill communicated his confidence in his soft skills as well as his instructional leadership skills. This combination of confidence and ability would fit into the model of next level leadership.

Taking risks can become a defining moment in an APs career. AP participants were asked if they were ever in a defining moment, either positive or negative, that may have stood out in their mind as a critical event that left an impression with district

leadership as to their potential of becoming a principal. Three participants identified events that stood out to them as possibly having a positive impact on their future as a principal.

AP Moore discussed her experience as an exceptional children's teacher. She was asked by the district to attend a professional development that led to her leading training within her district. This instructional leadership opportunity provided her with an opportunity to be noticed by district leadership.

All of my knowledge, my professional development before coming to the administrative role had—was centered around the exceptional child, so I was given the opportunity to go to a state improvement workshop with two other ladies. I want you to go to the initial training which was a five-day training, glean what you can and then we'll talk about it when you come back, and I was like oh, that's great, I worked a lot with research-based interventions for reading in my classroom, had brought several of, one specific program to the school I worked at, and used it, implemented it, and we implemented it across all of the exceptional children's classes. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Ellis recalled her defining moment occurred when she was asked to serve as the interim principal at her high school after the resignation of her principal.

Okay, that would definitely be when I was the interim principal last year for a short time. I didn't really have a choice, well I did kind of have a choice, the other AP could have taken it, but Dr. Rogers suggested I take it just because I'd been here a little bit longer, and hearing the feedback from everyone about what a good job we did with the situation that was handed to us, and realizing that it is something that I can do and I think other people recognized that as well. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

Ellis felt that experience showed that she could handle being a principal and it also showed her that the district had confidence in her ability to lead a school.

Finally, current AP Barker, who is retired from another state and served over 34 years as teacher, AP and principal, discussed an event in which the superintendent and his principal asked him to come in for a meeting and the superintendent asked Barker to sit in the principal's chair. Barker knew that the district was telling him you are going to be promoted to an assistant principal.

We started a regional alternative school and I was the director for a short while over this regional alternative school, and the superintendent at the time, and it was kind of like assured, you know, the superintendent at the time came to my school, I was in the classroom, and he asked me to come to the principal's office and, you know, I did, and when I walked in he asked me to sit in the principal's seat, and the principal's, he's sitting there, superintendent here, and he's like have a seat, have a seat over there (in the principal chair), and I'm like okay, why do you want me to sit, you know, I said that's his seat, you know, he's the principal, he was like no, go ahead, so I did. And he was like well how does it feel? (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

Barker also identified that after this meeting with the superintendent, he was hired as an AP. During his first few weeks on the job a major event occurred at the school and he had to handle the entire incident due to the principal's absence. He feels that his actions were also instrumental in being named a principal the next year.

My very first major incident dealt around a student accusing a teacher of sexual impropriety. So I had to go through that process and I was new, I had an older assistant principal, he wasn't in the building, the principal's gone, and here it is me, you know, and so I went through the process and I found out later the principal came back and he told me that—of course did everything correct, shared with the assistant superintendent, and he—the principal at the time made the comment to me that, you know, I feel good leaving the school in your care, and three or four months later, I was assigned a principalship. So I think that was my defining moment. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty County)

Defining moments can also be events that are perceived by the district as being negative and could prohibit an AP from future promotions. None of the AP participants identified this type of defining moment. The district leaders also did not identify any specific defining moments with their current APs, but they did note the importance of consistent, quality performance within the job.

Listening and the power of perception. The soft skill of listening is important. Barker believes that listening is one of the most important skills an AP can have. APs who can listen to others can find connections and common ground with others -- whether that is a frustrated teacher, an upset parent or an angry student.

I think first and foremost you need to be a listener, you know, and one of the things that I've tried to do over the course of years is, you know, listen, listen to my staff, you know, and I try to treat them all—I don't care what position you held in my building, you know, you had a voice, you had a voice, and I think that's, you know, critical. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

Perception is important to acknowledge. If an AP is perceived to be unwilling to assist, unwilling to listen or unwilling to compromise, then their fate can be sealed in their district. District leaders want APs who can not only problem solve, improve instructional outcomes, and build strong partnerships, they want leaders who are humble and can recognize their role in supporting others. APs have to possess soft skills that allow them to build relationships and foster collaboration.

We had a former assistant principal of ours who was very, very, very smart and very good and could be a very dynamic instructional leader, she had the responsibility though of being an assistant principal who had to deal with busses and butts and she hated buses and butts so much that she began to voice that every time I was around her and publicly to other people, other APs, that perception,

that began to leave, sorry, a bad taste in my mouth, personally with me. (Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

The district leadership team in Roanoke County summed up the importance and power of perception. Once an AP has been labeled or has developed a certain perception, it is very difficult to overcome that. Even when district leadership changes, the new leadership seeks to gain insights into the past from those that remain. The power of perception is critical to understand for APs who seek principal positions.

Elliot: Perception is very powerful. I don't think we can discount perception on that,

Carrie: Because I think we, we form opinions in our minds, you know, if we hear that someone says, you know, I work ten months, I'm not gonna do that, that stays with you for a very long time,

Elise: It does.

Norm: and it's hard to shake that perception of that person. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Carrie Jones, Director, Elise Innis and Norm Evans, Assistant Superintendents, Roanoke)

Once district leaders develop a negative perception of an AP, it can be difficult for the AP to overcome and can cause the AP to be stuck in the position.

We had a former assistant superintendent and my secretary and I used to lament about people who got on her list and once you got on the list it was hard to get off the list. People have a perception and you have to work ten times harder than you would have before if you got on that bad list. (Norm Evans, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

Summary. The phrase “next level leadership” was used by Superintendent Roarke to describe what he looks for in aspiring principals. I used Roarke's phrase with

other district participants also to gather insights into what attributes districts look for as possible indicators of a successful future principal. Leaders want APs who are not complacent; they do not want someone who is viewed as a career AP in the principal's office. Districts want individuals who can make sound decisions and can follow the expectations of the district. While districts value sound decision making, they also want APs to possess the confidence to take initiative and to also make calculated risks to accomplish goals. APs who possess next level leadership skills are easy to spot according to district leaders. They not only handle the day to day challenges of the AP, but are openly working with the district to accomplish goals and promote improvement. APs who do not demonstrate next level leadership may find themselves stuck in the role of AP. Because district leaders are the individuals who are making hiring decisions, knowing their views on why certain APs do not become principals is critical for the research study. Superintendent Rogers shared that it is never one thing that prevents an AP from becoming a principal.

It's never one factor, you know, when it comes to it [not being selected for a principalship], one thing, that's not going to define you, but then people add [certain issues] on top of the other things because they really just don't like you. I mean, you know, and it's because your interactions and how you handled this thing, or how you handled this. So you know, I've never known of one event that defined somebody, but it's always a series of events, or really, a series of interactions that prohibits somebody from being a principal. (Mark Rogers – Liberty County)

Rogers even goes as far to say that it comes down to people not liking the AP based on a series of interactions. These interactions could be considered a direct result of the personality of individual APs. Other district leaders agree that personality plays a

role. Superintendent Roarke shared a story about an AP who is perceived to be cocky. This is hindering this AP's opportunities. Roarke has heard from principals that the AP is cocky and needs to tone down his attitude and personality.

Aspiring principals and current APs should want to understand the opinions of district leaders and work to implement practices into their own daily work than can open opportunities. District leaders discussed the importance of sound decision making from APs. District leaders want to know that when an AP is named principal the new principal will not get themselves or the district into trouble based on poor decisions that are made. District leaders also want their principals to be able to accept responsibility and not shift blame to someone else. This indicates trustworthiness and strong character. Principals need effective soft skills and should be aware of how they are perceived by their staff as well as district leaders. In addition, district leaders want principals to be the instructional leader in the school. APs who do not possess the skills that district leaders want will not become a principal in that district. This section examined research question three by identifying the skills and characteristics needed for the principalship. APs that do not exhibit these skills and characteristics often are not promoted to the principalship based on the perceptions of district leaders.

The Necessity of Seeking and Attaining Development as an AP

Schools depend on assistant principals to fulfill the managerial tasks that are often taken for granted within a school. As Carolyn Carter stated in the quote below, the importance and value of assistant principals is often overlooked in the success of our schools. Districts often see effective APs as future principals.

. . . people don't really realize the importance of an assistant principal, because they play a vital role, because the principal couldn't do everything in a school, and to me I don't think it's looked upon as, as much as it should be looked on as being an important asset (Carolyn Carter, Director of Human Resources, Liberty)

Intentional assistant principal development is an important component in the growth of APs to ensure that they will be ready for the principalship when that opportunity occurs. The participating districts had different and often inconsistent approaches and ideas on AP development. The following four elements emerged that impact effective AP development: inconsistent district practices; mentoring; feedback to APs; and reflective practice. This section will discuss the need for – and lack of – AP development that can provide access or limitations to the principalship, providing insight into research questions one and three. Excerpts from both AP participants and district leaders explore how the presence (or lack of) of AP development can influence the opportunities for attaining the principalship.

Inconsistent district practices. Superintendent Roarke from Roanoke County sees AP development as the district's responsibility. With an applicant shortage and salary freezes from the state, potential APs are in short supply in rural districts.

I think it's our responsibility to get it right, to hold people accountable for having it right and to continue to work and try to help people grow if they're not proficient, you know, it's easy to come in and crack the whip but what are you doing to help them grow, I think that's a, that's a part that we're, I mean you I don't, you know, we're reading a book right now and part of its build the bench, we know we have to build the bench, we have to get people in the administrative pipeline. We have to grow the people we have in the administration ranks because we don't have a ton of people lining up at the door to be administrators right now with this huge pay scale freeze on the administrators, and teachers are making more, so you know we've got what we've got and we better grow them

and try to help them grow and try to help our principals have positive relationships with them. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

The Roanoke County Focus Group also recalled a previous time when APs did not receive any training or support from the district. Roanoke County saw a need to create an Assistant Principal Leadership Academy that now meets monthly. The focuses of these meetings are more than information sharing. Professional development is offered to the APs.

Innis: And I might add that I remember a time when we didn't meet with assistant principals, and the request came from assistant principals to meet, for them to meet as a group and to meet with district level leaders because they wanted to grow, so I believe we started meeting quarterly and then quarterly went to monthly and now it's, it's really just part of our master calendar for the year.

Evans: And you know, part of that, in the assistant principal academy, when it was quarterly, we had instructional specialists and those instructional specialists were required to do the monthly meetings and did a lot of that day-to-day work in instruction but now our assistant principals are expected to do all of that and that's one reason that's become a monthly meeting, because there's a lot of work to be done. (Elise Innis, Norm Evans, Assistant Superintendents, Roanoke)

Assistant Superintendent Innis discussed the importance of training APs to lead professional development. APs cannot be expected to lead effectively if they are not given opportunities to practice. Roanoke County assigns their APs to specific PLCs (professional learning communities) as a facilitator.

Our APs had never been trained at the same level as our principals, so we've not spent that money sending them away to be trained, but Ms. Jones and I have trained them and gone over the same back-to-basics information with them because we're expecting them to lead a PLC just like a principal does, you're

assigned to one, be in that PLC, monitor that PLC, answer those hard questions in that PLC meeting and so that's what we're doing with them is trying to revisit all of that with them. (Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

Modeling the expectations is important for districts if they want leaders to carry out district initiatives and plans. Assistant Superintendent Evans discussed the importance of modeling as APs begin to step into leadership roles and away from the strictly managerial tasks associated with the assistant principal position.

. . . one of our reasons for going to that different format that's become you know more teaching than just going through lists of things and requirements is for us to model that for our school leaders and with the hope that they take that same kind of approach to their faculty meetings and you want to talk about a great chance for an assistant principal to shine as a school leader, to lead a group though some of the kinds of things that Dr. Innis and Ms. Jones lead us through in the mornings at our leadership team meetings, a great opportunity for our APs to have that opportunity to step out of that role of manager and into leader. (Norm Evans, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

Liberty County district leaders also discussed the importance of AP development. During a focus group interview Director of Elementary Programs Carlson discussed a previous superintendent's commitment to AP development. Carlson described her experiences as an AP in Liberty County. She stated that with only four APs in the entire district, the former superintendent made an effort to regularly meet and get to know the APs in Liberty County.

The superintendent nurtured all of the APs into what she wanted as far as a principal was concerned, and she probably had more to do with nurturing and growing those APs than actually the building principal within the school (Alice Carlson, Director of Elementary, Liberty)

Assistant Superintendent Adkins discussed how leadership opportunities in Liberty County allowed district leaders to get a sense of the presence and potential for future opportunities for APs. In smaller districts such as Liberty, district officials have more opportunities for direct impact and interaction with APs.

APs that would serve as presenters, and so as a director or assistant superintendent, as a superintendent you see the way they [APs] conduct themselves, how do they handle, you know, how organized they are, what kind of present—how good of a presenter were they? I mean that just—it sends a light bulb, you know, turns on a light bulb for those individuals, so I think that's important. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

Human Resource Director Carter discussed not only providing professional development for APs, but also the importance of mentors for APs. Mentors could help APs avoid potential traps and pitfalls. However, in this research project there is a lack of any formal mentoring programs for APs. The role of mentoring will be examined later in this chapter.

Involving assistant principals now, or any type of professional development that an assistant principal could get involved in will be beneficial for, you know, them preparing. And probably just pairing them up with a—not necessarily the principal that they work with, but giving them a mentor could be helpful as well, because everybody doesn't think the same way, you know, their problem-solving strategies aren't the same or the way you see and perceive things that I may not think if—of it as being a big deal, but another person may blow it all out of proportion, but you know, just having the extra support. (Carolyn Carter, Director of Human Resources, Liberty)

Superintendent Roarke understands the importance of preparing for the future. In a district the size of Roanoke (19 schools), transition is a regular occurrence, and the

potential for retirement and relocation requires that a solid pipeline of AP talent is ready for the next step.

We know succession planning is important, but you can't wait until you get in a crisis and need people to then try to go out here and look for them, it's too late. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Two of the four participating districts have a newly formed development program for their APs. Both districts (Roanoke and Axton) have Assistant Principal Leadership Academies. Assistant Principals Oneil and Hill in Axton County shared that they find value in their Assistant Principal Academy. Axton County contracts with a local university to provide professors who work with district APs.

My current district, I think they do a lot for us in that regards. Our AP Academy is very structured. There's a format for each meeting, they bring in university professors as facilitators. We also have a lot of online webinars and online professional development opportunities and we get no credits for those whereas one of my previous districts, and all due respects to my previous district but those AP meetings were, sometimes they were cancelled, it wasn't a priority as they are where I am now so that's one—that's something I surely appreciate about where I am. (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton)

. . . it's a mix, and what our district has done this year is—usually there's a little bit of give and take of information for the first little bit, but two professors, the actual two professors that I had at Carolina for my admin program, have been down here every session and they do like an hour and a half thing on leadership that's a group exercise (Thomas Hill, AP, Axton)

The other districts do not have any formal program for APs and none of the districts have a mentoring program. Districts charge sitting principals with providing professional development and support for their APs. The effectiveness of those offerings corresponds to the willingness, direction and focus of the sitting principal. These

inconsistencies in providing formal growth and development structures for APs could contribute to APs being stuck instead of being prepared for the principalship.

Mentoring. The role of mentoring is such an important element for the growth and development within any profession.

I think again it's critical to have a good mentor program, just as we have mentor programs for our teachers, you know, I tell folk, and I—all our colleagues, I said look man, we got to talk to one another, you can't do this by yourself. (Ron Barker, Liberty)

AP Barker shared his thoughts on the value and importance of mentoring programs and support for administrators. Barker retired from a district that had a strong mentoring presence; however, most of the districts in this study have very informal mentoring supports if any at all.

Superintendent Rogers laughed as he made the statement below; however, it is true. The districts participating in this research study do not have strong mentoring programs for administrators and certainly not for APs.

We hand them the keys, that's our mentoring program, nothing on a formal basis other than informational purposes. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

Superintendent Roarke stated that he creates a formal entry plan for new principals that outlined certain expectations for their first months on the job, but that happens once someone has been named principal. So the AP does not know what the entry plan looks like until they are named principal.

I don't know that we have a formal mentoring program for APs. For principals I try to assign, and we really, I guess I become a mentor but I try to, I don't know that we have a formal process for new principals other than that entry plan. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

AP Ellis stated that in her district, the role of mentor is assigned to principals. They are charged with developing their APs. A concern that I have is the lack of time needed for this type of mentoring program to be successful. In addition, the role of mentor should also involve some level of confidence so that one can share frustrations and seek advice. This may be difficult to do with your principal. Mentors also need training on what effective mentoring involves.

I would say that the superintendent and assistant superintendent, you know, place that responsibility on the principals informally to coach their APs and help develop them, it's not anything formal. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

APs Owens, Nelson and Hill all supported the same experience that Ellis shared above. The expectation is the principal serves as your mentor. Otherwise, you have to identify someone on your own.

I mean you get your experience from the person that you work for and then I guess as far as other APs, you know, we work together, but that's kind of self-initiated but there's a group of us, like I, you know, that I would call or that would call me and so yeah, nothing set. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

No, not for an administrator, not formal. It's just a matter of who you want to connect with and who you want to go to with your questions. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

It's informal, you have to sort of, you create that yourself. I don't have a mentor. (Thomas Hill, AP, Axton)

AP Hill also shared that a formal mentoring program that involved someone from outside the school (or principal) would be difficult to imagine. He feels that the district would be concerned about APs sharing information and it might create rumblings and rumors.

I think that would shake the status quo to its foundations (having a mentoring program), and I think the reason that it would is because leaders are all about loyalty and mentor relationships are all about trust, and when I'm in this building with this leader, that's that person's role, and if I was to have a mentor outside of this building whether it was at another school or even at central office, I think there would be worry about what we were talking about and what the political, you know, rumblings would be, you know let's say I have the worst day ever and it's here and I go home and I complain to my mentor who, you know, suddenly we've—there's a level of confidentiality there that's lost. (Thomas Hill, AP, Axton)

Assistant Superintendent Adkins admitted the lack of a mentor can be an issue that is hard to overcome for an AP. Not having a mentor could prohibit someone from developing into a principal and support this idea of being stuck as an AP. Districts should consider looking at retired APs or retired principals who were successful in their roles as potential mentors.

That can be a stumbling block, if the assistant principal does not have a good mentor, and it—you were talking about how they get into ruts and you're going to—I mean there are situations where their APs, I mean they're APs all their life, either they just don't have the ambition to move up, or they've been in the position where there's just not a good mentor to grow them into a principalship. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

HR Director Carter admitted that her district understands the need and they are hoping to start a mentoring program for APs.

They never really have anybody, like a role model, well, like mentor, to really assist them in, because we have a lot of new principals, not just APs new in a position, but we have a lot of new principals and we're hoping to get that established. (Carolyn Carter, Director of Human Resources, Liberty)

Although Vernon County does not have formal mentoring program, they have started an Assistant Principal Leadership Academy that serves as a networking opportunity for the district's APs. APs have learned that they have to take initiative and seek out mentors and learn from the opportunities their current principals provide.

The district level initiated this, started having monthly AP meetings, partially to kind of go over what's been accomplished at the district staff meeting the week before but also to provide some of that leadership preparation and you know, sessions on budgeting, for example, and what that looks like in the school so it's not a formal, you're assigned a mentor as an AP but it is a tight-knit community, there's only 12 assistant principals in the county and you get together once a month, you start to network and we call each other and I think the principals in general, the principals in this county are focused on making their APs into principals. (Olivia Apple, Principal, Vernon)

AP Moore shared she has learned from each principal she has served. Moore views her principals as mentors that have assisted her own development. She has taken components from all the people she has worked with and used those experiences to develop and refine her own leadership style.

I have learned from every principal I've worked under. I think that in itself is the most beneficial part to me, every year is a year, first I had a principal tell me one time that this, my first year as an AP, she said oh, there'll be so many firsts this year, your first this, your first that, but really, that happens every day, so I love the fact that I come to work every day and I'll go home learning something new or having something to add in my belt or having something to say oh, I've dealt with this before and this is how we can deal with this now, I think that's my favorite part of the administrative role, is working with people, learning from them,

watching their leadership styles, and taking pieces and parts that kind of develop my own personal leadership style. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Owens also shared that she has learned a great deal from her principal.

Owens stated that her principal is a good role model for her as she aspires to become a principal.

I do have a great leader that I'm learning a lot from and for me, I am a person who wants to get better all the time and she has just been a good example for that personally and professionally. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Although Liberty County does not have a formal mentoring program, Assistant Superintendent Adkins does have conversations with APs. His warm and welcoming demeanor allows him to be seen as a district leader who is willing to listen and offer advice.

I've met the assistant principals and had conversations, I think sometimes they appreciate it's not that I approach it and say this is the way I would have done it, I approach it, let me tell you what I did and boy, if I could be a Monday morning quarterback, you know, I would have done it differently, and a lot of times they just appreciate hearing that, you know, real life type situations that I've experienced, and then sharing that with them so that at least maybe make them a little aware of what could happen and I think, I take that a little bit of mentoring, you know, just sharing personal experiences, not telling them this is the way they should do it or this how I would do it, I just say I've done this and if I could do it over, I would try this, you know, based on what I've—my experience. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

Unfortunately, and at the expense of AP development, none of the districts have a formal mentoring process for their APs. While some districts have AP Leadership Academies, these academies do not provide a formal mentor to guide and lead APs in

their quest for the principalship. Even though districts want their APs to feel comfortable with approaching them with questions and concerns, APs need someone they are more comfortable with and can share honestly their thoughts and feelings, without fear of repercussion. Formal mentoring programs could alleviate those concerns of APs. The value of a mentor could prevent many common mistakes that APs make as well as provide them needed guidance, advice and most importantly feedback that could assist them in becoming a principal.

Feedback to APs. Effective feedback involves constructive details centered on specific evidences that promote growth and development. APs perceive that a lack of feedback to support their development is a contributing factor to them remaining stuck in the assistant principalship.

They called and said that they had selected somebody else for that, but I pretty much gathered that by that point, and then they said that there would be feedback later on but there wasn't. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

Districts need to provide feedback to their APs after interviews. If the district does not provide feedback on ways to improve or areas they need improvement, then APs stay in the dark and they continue to perform the same way. APs Moore and Richards both shared that they have not received needed feedback, despite being told feedback was coming.

One of the things I've been frustrated with, there has been very, very little feedback to me over the course of the last eight years, very little feedback. Very little feedback. [Have you sought it, have you] Yes. Very little feedback other than you're gonna be a principal soon. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

As AP Richards stated, he has gotten very little feedback in eight years. Because of the lack of feedback, he naturally assumes there must be other reasons that he has not been principal. Frustration builds and resentment sets in and now Richards is ready to leave the position. The lack of feedback creates feelings of animosity, as well as creates opportunities for APs to speculate regarding why they remain stuck as an AP.

I promise you you're going be a principal very soon, he said just not right now and he said you're a good man, he said you're a good leader and you're ready, just not right now, he said you would be one soon, I promise. He came over here, Charles, he came over here about three days later, he didn't want to look me in the eye, he did not, he sort of tapped me with his umbrella, he had an umbrella in his hand, he tapped my foot with his umbrella, he did not want to make eye contact with me, and I just sorta feel I'm that person, you know, that's the way they view me. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

Richards recalled this interaction with a district leader in which he was told to be patient, but at the same time he has been patient for eight years. No one has ever talked to Richards about being outspoken or having a rental property business or the direct way in which he talks to parents and students and other staff. Districts have a responsibility to provide feedback or insist that principals provide feedback to APs.

Feedback is often difficult to provide and receive. Individuals tend to see feedback as being personal and attacking one's character or personality. Effective feedback is also time-consuming in that it requires an effective rapport and relationship between the giver and the receiver. However, providing feedback is one of the most important aspects of a principal's job. Providing feedback to APs begins with the principal. The principal is the direct supervisor of the AP and the principal has the most interaction with the AP. Districts should invest time coaching principals in providing

effective feedback, especially if principals are not developing their APs. Feedback should actively involve the AP reflecting on questions, not being told what they need to do. Feedback is most effective when the AP has an active role in the conversation. Districts would be wise to invest time in the art of providing feedback; it would help prevent APs from feeling stuck. In as much as it is critical that feedback be given, it is just as critical for APs to be reflective and willing to receive it. This reflective practice is also an element that impacts development.

Reflective practice. Reflection can be difficult for APs, especially for APs who are truly stuck in the role. Reflection requires that an AP critically examine the factors that could possibly be limiting their promotion opportunities, including feedback being provided to them by principals and district leaders.

Reflecting on needed areas of improvement is critical to achieving goals. AP Owens has reflected on her own personal growth areas. She knows that being able to show and demonstrate appreciation is important for her growth.

I think for me what I have learned is that you really have to, you know, show your appreciation for all people in your building, the staff, custodians, and you also have to be willing to do what they do every day, you know, I've been here this week and our night custodian hasn't been here which meant I knew that at two o'clock if somebody threw up, that was my job to clean up, but I've worked for people who would have never gone and cleaned that up, she has shown me like, I believe that morale in the building is good because she is willing to do that. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Owens also has to work on her poker face and being able to hide her emotions. In addition, she mentioned the importance of humbling herself to achieve these growth opportunities.

I think for me the thing that I continue to work on is not showing that I dislike something, like a comment or a performance, or—I'm still working on my poker face for lack of a better—I tend, I have over time gotten much better with not saying exactly what I think, so that's what I work on continually. I had to humble myself first, and then I needed to figure out that everybody has their own story as to what's affecting them, so I've come a long way with it, I feel like I can now, like I said, stuff doesn't, I don't take anything personally anymore, stuff doesn't bother me, but there are still times where somebody might say something, I think—I know that from like what? So I—I'm just working on that part. That's something that personally I feel like I've grown a lot with, but I could still improve on. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

AP Nelson has identified that the ability to work with others and build relationships is critical to her development. She is task oriented and likes to get things done, but understanding that everyone has a different pace, is important. Recognizing people need encouragement is important.

One skill that I would have said seven or eight years ago that was my weakest, I have worked on specifically and that is being a person who sees the job as working with people rather than just getting a job done. When I was in my twenties I was very driven to the point where I'll never forget one morning walking up to a teacher and saying we needed to take care of this, this this, and this and she looked at me and said good morning to you, too, and I—it has made an impact on me, just that small little conversation. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

As important as it is for APs to be reflective and to work on their own personal development, it is also equally important for principals and district leaders to also be reflective and accepting of others who have made mistakes and give them another chance.

I see good in everybody and I'm sure that—an AP had burned em, or said something or done something and they'd say hell no, they ain't gonna get a damn job in my county, and I may have thought it one or two times, but I've changed. I

have said, I got burned and I ain't, giving you a chance, but then, you know, give me a minute or give me an hour or give me a day or give me a week, or year, whatever, and they always—people always rebound themselves in my mind, you know, because I just always believe in people when it comes down to it. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

Superintendent Rogers emphasized that he does see the potential in everyone and that is important for APs to know that the district will not give up on you. If you as AP are committed to improving, then the district should continue to support and assist the AP in reaching their goal.

APs would be wise to invest in a 360-degree feedback protocol where they receive feedback from several sources. When APs have self-evaluated, then they should turn to trusted individuals for their honest opinion concerning what the individual AP has done or needs to do. Receiving and acting on feedback from colleagues, mentors, principals and district leaders can show willingness that an AP is developing and growing in hopes of meeting the goal of becoming principal.

Summary. AP development is important and critical for districts; as districts know the importance of having qualified and capable APs who are ready to step into principalships when vacancies occur. In my experience, districts prefer to hire from within if they have quality APs who the district already knows and are familiar with, as they search for principals. Developing APs who are ready for the principalship requires commitment from the district as well as the AP to seek out opportunities for AP development. However, a well-rounded development program would include a formal mentoring component for APs. The districts in this study lack formal mentoring programs. Mentoring programs for APs is not the norm in districts in this study, and I

speculate it is not across the state either. In addition to formal support structures, it is also critical for APs to receive feedback and be reflective practitioners willing to receive feedback when it is given. When these elements are not present, it limits the APs development of next level leadership skills. If opportunities for personal growth and development are limited, then APs may not be able to develop the skills and traits needed in the role of principal, thus remaining stuck as AP.

APs Need Key Experiences for the Principalship

APs are expected to arrive early and make sure the day is ready to run smoothly. Daily responsibilities often include obtaining substitutes for each absent teacher, greeting buses or car riders, cafeteria supervision and other mundane aspects associated with the position of AP. My findings indicate that the managerial tasks associated with the position leave little time for developing skills needed in the principalship and contribute to being stuck in the assistant principalship. This section explores the daily experiences and responsibilities of APs and how these limit their development of instructional leadership and budget, two skills that AP participants discussed as critical to the principalship. As AP Oneil (Axton County) stated, “too often APs are just seen as managers.” AP Barker acknowledged that APs often live in a state of reaction as noted below.

I guess you could describe it as being reactive to whatever occurs, you know, of course you come in with a plan, you know, it's one of the things that, you know, I've learned over the course of years, even though your plan may not work out as well as you anticipate, and situations do come up, and you just have to deal with them. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

This section explores data that speaks to research question two in examining the shared daily responsibilities and experiences of APs and how they support or don't support promotion to the principalship. As stated above, AP Oneil and AP Barker report that the primary role of APs (especially the APs in this project) is managerial.

Shared daily responsibilities. As I reflect on my first year as an AP, I remember my principal meeting with me and assigning my duties and responsibilities. Discipline for sixth and eighth grades, custodians and building maintenance, substitutes, and buses. I asked if I would work with any departments and he said these assignments would keep me busy. He was certainly right. The APs in this study all shared their daily responsibilities and duties which involved primarily managerial tasks.

Assistant principals are responsible for a myriad of diverse responsibilities; however, most can be classified as managerial in nature. These responsibilities can often be time consuming and leave little time for educational leadership roles. AP Oneil details typical AP responsibilities:

There's certain tasks that are common assistant principal duties be it keys, overseeing custodial duties, overseeing different scheduling matters, be it scheduling testing, scheduling classes, scheduling, you know, supervision before school and after school, buses to an extent, textbooks. (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton)

In addition to the daily responsibilities, unexpected events can occur, whether they are emergencies or just something unforeseen.

. . . the day-to-day things that come up that you didn't necessarily expect of course and that is the emergency or the parent complaint or the meetings that—we spend a lot of time in meetings. Safety, that's another one of our responsibilities, is I am the chair of the safety committee here at our school and I have to make

sure that everything is always taken care of as far as fire drills on a monthly basis, the paperwork as well as all of our inspections (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

Even on a normal day, the supervisory component of being an AP is tedious. APs are expected to be on duty to supervise student activity. They are often seen as the watchdog for school safety and orderliness of the entire campus.

I'm expected to be in the cafeteria in the mornings on cafeteria duty. Our buses start releasing at seven-twenty and our home room doesn't release until seven forty-five, so from that time I'm in the cafeteria which is where we house all of our students. [So starting at seven-twenty?] Uh-huh. I get here earlier most days, but seven-twenty and I monitor the cafeteria, I make sure the students are, you know, doing what they're supposed to. When the bell releases for home room we have five minutes between classes, I walk, we have a courtyard, I walk through the courtyard and up and down hallways just to make sure students are where they should be, so between every class I'm out in the hallways monitoring. We have three lunches here, I cover one and a half lunches, so first and part of second lunch I cover, so I'm in there. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

Despite the varied responsibilities of APs, there are consistent, shared daily responsibilities such as buses, discipline, and test coordination that APs are tasked with overseeing, which limits their time to develop next level leadership skills.

Buses. Bus duty is viewed as a rite of passage for APs. There are very few who escape this experience. Bus duty includes hiring drivers, finding substitute drivers, assigning bus discipline, knowing the route assignments, managing field trip requests, and supervision in the morning and afternoons. Everyone seems to despise bus duty. Another critical component of buses is keeping your drivers happy. Drivers are the first and last school employees that students see every day. A grumpy driver will often lead to a grumpy student.

Buses are my chief responsibility I guess as the day starts, which can start at five in the morning. I advertise, I interview, I hire, I set up substitutes and make sure the buses are running smoothly. (Thomas Hill, AP, Axton)

My assistant principal duties were very different from what I'd anticipated. I was responsible for buses in that assigning routes, rerouting bus routes for new students, hiring bus drivers, finding substitute bus drivers, making sure bus drivers had their drug tests, so do—and then the bus discipline (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

Buses are another one of my responsibilities. We only have six buses here, and all of our drivers work here in the building so that's a big plus for us. It's about 50% of our population ride the bus and the other 50% are car riders. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

Well, the way we do it here is the new person gets buses and ninth and tenth graders. [So you get broken in, right?] Yeah, so I had that my first year here, I had buses and ninth and tenth graders, so he came in after me, so it got passed down to him. [So earn your stripes] It is. It is, so he does complain about it, I mean as everybody does, nobody likes buses, so he does complain about it, but I mean I step in and help. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

I'm in charge of buses, I am—we sort of share discipline responsibilities, on the buses (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

Discipline. Discipline is another rite of passage for APs. Much of the stress of the AP position is a result of the daily grind of dealing with discipline. Discipline occurs every day at every school, “Discipline is always gonna be consistent across the spectrum” (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton). It is something that you know as an AP you will deal with each day you are at work. As AP Barker stated, you never know what you will walk into, but you can be sure it will be there.

Discipline, yes, of course, and one of the things, and when it comes to discipline, you just don't know, you just don't know what's going to happen. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

There are some rare exceptions to the rule of discipline. Sometimes individuals find a unique setting or are blessed to work with a principal who believes in sharing the load. AP Nelson in Vernon County described her situation:

I do very little discipline, but that is one of my responsibilities. We have possibly one discipline referral a week which is fabulous, but I do share that responsibility with the principal, she has three grade levels and I have three grade levels.
(Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

This example is not the norm in school settings, as most APs are primarily responsible for discipline in the school. APs who find their daily routine dealing with disruptive students can quickly become disillusioned and frustrated. In AP Richards's case, he has been in this same school as an AP for eight years. The daily grind certainly wears on him. Richards detailed the harsh reality of some at-risk and troubled youth. Students like James can be very difficult. They can be resistant to advice or even support. Previous struggles and bad experiences often build until students like James erupt. Unfortunately, teachers and APs like Mr. Richards often bear the brunt of the eruption.

James is the kid's name who we suspended probably a third of the last month of school because he's dropping the F-bomb on a teacher and then he's down there, won't listen to me, you know, it's just we can't do anything with James and I get tired of the teacher coming to me—that's my job. I don't begrudge a teacher for that, [Right.] but the teacher coming to me, expecting me to fix it. [You have the same frustration.] I have the same frustration, right, as that same teacher does, yes and that's what has—that's what gets me. (Holt Richards, AP, Liberty)

The time it takes to attend to student discipline consumes a large part of the APs day, creating a pattern of frustration and perception of being stuck in a rut. In addition, it creates little time for development next level leadership skills.

Testing coordinator. A change in state policy created an additional responsibility for many assistant principals. In the past, testing was a responsibility that most guidance counselors handled. However, legislation and policy has since been put in place that prohibits guidance counselors from being the school testing coordinator. As a result, most schools now have an assistant principal who is designated as the testing coordinator. The role of testing coordinator can vary in responsibility depending on the level you are working. An elementary AP who is the testing coordinator has much less responsibilities than a high school AP, due to the increased number of assessments at the high school level. Testing has become the new “Bain” of the AP world, almost on par with buses.

I have a lot of testing responsibilities. I would say a third of my time is consumed by just facilitating the testing process in a school of my size. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

All of our assistant principals except for two at the high school level, are also testing coordinators for their school as well, like in a lot of districts, so they have the responsibility of test security and organization of the testing cycle. (Norm Evans, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

I was in charge of testing as an assistant principal and that included quarterly benchmark testing and ensuring that those, all of the accommodations, we had accounted for and making sure everybody had a place to go and—as well as the end of the year testing. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

Testing coordinator, that’s a huge part of my job. I spend a good majority of my time with testing because we have three benchmarks and we have, of course, the end of grade testing, plus we have other various assessments that come and go. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

I think the other frustrating thing is especially the end of your testing, having to involve so many people outside their comfort level and essentially having to tell people what to do and they have to suck it up and do it whether they like it or not, it's not the kind of person I am and that's not the kind of leader I am, but that was very—that was upsetting to have to do that over and over and over. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

As AP Apple stated above, testing can be frustrating and extremely time consuming. Testing responsibilities increase near the end of semesters (for middle and high schools) and at the end of the year (for all schools), the other daily responsibilities and components of the AP position remain, thus increasing the pressure and stress on APs.

Instructional leadership. District leaders and supervisors discussed the importance of instructional leadership. It was an integral component to what district officials seek in hiring principals. However, in many instances, APs are limited with their exposure to instructional leadership due to the managerial aspects of the position.

I remember having that conversation of my real passion and my real love . . . but as an assistant principal I had gotten well away from anything that had to do with instruction except for doing—still doing observations, that was about it. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

Finding opportunities to develop and demonstrate instructional leadership can be difficult; especially at the secondary level. One implication garnered from the participants in this study, is that elementary APs have more opportunities to develop instructional leadership, even though those opportunities are often limited due to the daily managerial responsibilities of APs. AP Owens has taken advantage of the leadership opportunities within Roanoke County's AP Leadership Academy. Owens has been

identified to facilitate curriculum, pacing guide revisions and instructional resource development through the use of School Net in her district.

I am one of five people, one of five other assistant principals who is helping with some curriculum reshaping in our district, I also led a district-wide training earlier in the year about power schools and the use of School Net and using data for that, I continue to push that and using School Net more effectively in our classrooms. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Current Principal Olivia Apple obtained her promotion to principal through her commitment to instructional leadership. Her initiative and drive to help teachers and facilitate a small instructional group of students needing remediation caught the attention of district leaders and led to her promotion to principal at a middle school.

I worked really closely as an instructional leader with teachers, getting into teachers' classrooms, trying to provide some coaching, we don't currently have curriculum facilitators or instructional coaches or anything in the schools, three of our schools do right now but, you know, I haven't worked in a school that has that so I'd, I really did try to take on that role of being in classrooms and helping troubleshoot and, you know, looking at data with teachers and saying okay, what else could we do, what could we do differently, you—really working with children one-on-one, and you know, that's where my passion is. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

AP Moore from Roanoke County has a background in elementary education. However, she now finds herself as a high school AP. Moore discussed her expertise and how she was able to establish herself as an elementary school instructional leader. Her work with literacy made a mark for herself; however, in her current role at the high school, she feels as if instructional leadership has taken a back seat to the many other managerial and supervisory activities that consume her day.

I felt like my expertise in elementary school, I focused heavily on early literacy, I worked on a task force in early literacy, high school principal—assistant principals are not given those opportunities like elementary are. In elementary I was completely immersed in early literacy plans, you know, I was an integral, I taught, I facilitated, I did professional development with Reading Foundations and State Improvement Project, I was given those opportunities in an elementary school and in a high school those opportunities are not available. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Moore felt as if coming to the high school has hindered her opportunity to further show her instructional leadership qualities. The challenges associated with high school are certainly a perceived barrier to future development, growth and promotion in the high school participants in this study.

My experience in elementary school is that those administrators stand out, they stand out instructionally, they stand out when their test scores come around as traditionally being a little bit higher because you're a little more motivated in that age, so I believe that they have the opportunity to focus solely on instruction and curriculum and growth which is what the district looks for and the state looks for, and I think when you come over to high school they know it's high stakes but they don't realize, I think that those administrators are not given the opportunity to stand out like an elementary administrator would be able to. I felt like my expertise in elementary school, I focused heavily on early literacy, I worked on a task force in early literacy, high school principal—assistant principals are not given those opportunities like elementary are.

I find it to be a challenge that there are 75 staff members and my interaction with them is unfortunately limited to, at times, how their students behave in their classroom or is student-specific. My love would be for me to have 50% managerial time and 50% in curriculum instruction to where I could actually facilitate learning. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

Other APs find it more difficult to demonstrate instructional leadership, no matter the assigned level. This could be attributed to the assigned responsibilities of APs and also the willingness of the current sitting principals to share and allow APs to participate

in instructional leadership activities. This will be explored later in this chapter when I examine APs' relationships with their principals.

AP Ellis acknowledged that she would like to have a bigger role in instructional leadership, while also admitting that her male AP counterpart is given fewer opportunities demonstrating instructional leadership because he is assigned the majority of discipline.

I would say that I'd like to share that title (instructional leader) with Mrs. Gunn, the principal, because she's very, very heavily involved in the instructional practices, so I would say yes, my role is more an instructional support person as opposed to the other AP. He's seen more as a disciplinarian, he handles buses and he also is very involved in athletics, so I'm more of the instructional person. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

AP Oneil discussed his need to develop his own instructional leadership and knowledge as he discussed the Common Core. AP Oneil is a former music major, and this could be a factor in his lack of knowledge of Common Core curriculum. AP Oneil's honesty, however, does demonstrate an awareness of his own limitation and his need to develop a better understanding of Common Core standards.

If someone was to ask me about, well what is in the Common Core, I could tell them that you know, it is more depth, less width but as far as specifics, to be honest I couldn't really tell you, and it's not that I'm, you know, I just don't know. [Just hadn't had access to that training.] I mean I could look it up as needed and I—when I'm in an observation I can see the standard on the board and look it up, but I couldn't tell you well, this is this grade or that's this subject or whatever, it's just, opportunity hasn't presented itself. (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton)

During the course of this study, a factor that seemed to emerge was gender based experiences within the AP position, specifically related to instructional leadership. Some

of this is explored and addressed in comments that were shared; however, I did see a common thread that many of the male APs had limited instructional leadership opportunities—even those male APs who had been viewed as solid teachers were often not provided additional instructional leadership opportunities.

AP Richards, who was a former high school math teacher, admittedly does not seek out instructional opportunities within the district, even though other APs are seeking those opportunities. He acknowledged that his resistance to explore and implement new initiatives has probably hindered his development. Richards described how he is not the type of AP who constantly calls the district office seeking instructional and curricular opportunities. Richards felt that his reluctance to pursue some of those instructional leadership opportunities has held him back in recent years. This failure to seek instructional leadership opportunities provides another example of that can contribute to APs being stuck.

Both district leaders and APs recognize the importance of developing and demonstrating instructional leadership, especially as it relates to attaining a principalship. However, given the daily managerial aspects within the role of the AP, it is hard for APs to develop instructional leadership skills, especially if the AP is not actively seeking opportunities or if the principal is not providing those opportunities for the AP. Some APs actively seek out those instructional opportunities through volunteering or simply through developing their own skills. However, other APs do not seek instructional leadership opportunities and allow the daily grind of the AP position to hinder their options for growth in this area. Finding opportunities at the secondary level can present

additional challenges, due to the scope of the activities such as additional supervision, discipline and managerial roles. APs at the secondary level certainly feel as if they are at a disadvantage when seeking instructional leadership opportunities.

Budget. As a district leader who has been a member of many interview panels, APs consistently express their desire for more experience working with school budgets. I have found that once APs move into the principalship, the difficulty does not lie with budgeting, but more specifically with strategic planning to effectively use the scarce financial resources provided to schools. However, the participants in this study expressed similar comments as other APs who have not experienced budget planning, as evidenced by their comments:

I've never been intricately involved with a finance officer to know what a—I mean I've seen the budget, I know the numbers and how to read it, but not directly involved enough for me. I would be nervous a little bit with a less than efficient finance officer as a principal, a new principal, because I don't want to go to jail. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Ellis was concerned regarding the specific budgetary processes that specifically deal with personnel, especially classified staff and the specific requirements for payroll and compensatory time.

Budgets, I really haven't had much experience at all with budget. I feel like that would be an area that I would need to learn more about, especially when it comes to your classified personnel and your hourly employees and how they're paid and how their comp time works and those types of things. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

Most APs are concerned about budgets. APs often hear that problems with finances and the budget is a sure way to get into trouble and possibly be fired. AP Owens described how she felt about her readiness to deal with budgets.

If I were to go out and be a principal tomorrow, the scariest part that I don't feel like I've been exposed to the most is really budgets. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Budget always comes up, you know, I was a magnet, when I was a magnet school coordinator I had the magnet budget, but that was a few years ago, now, you know, looking at all the different codes and accounts and where all the money comes from and where I can spend what, I think that until you get in there and you get your hands in it, it's hard to know exactly how the budget really works. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

AP Nelson's comments do ring true. As an AP, I never received any training on budgetary processes; much of that experience comes with on the job training and the support of a trustworthy book-keeper. My book-keepers all provided assistance and guidance on budgetary processes in my years as a principal. Even though, training can come from the book-keeper, these topics could be addressed in professional development sessions with APs as a segment of Leadership Academies.

Summary. The APs in this study discussed the challenges of buses, discipline, coordination of testing programs and the daily grind of the supervisory and managerial components of the position. APs receive training in their academic preparation courses on how to be a principal, but the reality of the AP position can create resentment and frustration, leaving APs often wondering when will I get out of this managerial cycle. Identifying the shared and common experiences of APs, as well as district level supervisors' opinions on the position of assistant principal, can help APs begin to shape

their future direction into the role of principal. This section focused on the daily shared responsibilities of APs to gather data on whether the daily responsibilities provided APs with the training needed to step into the role of principal. In my experience as former principal and current district level leader, APs who experience a balance between the managerial and instructional activities seem to be better prepared for the principalship. However, when APs are not allowed exposure into all aspects of the principalship, their daily routine can begin to pave a path to stuckness within the AP position.

Avoiding Critical Mistakes

Mistakes are made by everyone. Assistant principals are asked to handle so many managerial tasks, it is easy to get caught up in the fast pace of the job and make a mistake. Failure to take the time to fully investigate a discipline issue, forgetting to reserve the cafeteria for a community event, sharing too much information involving a personnel matter are just some examples of mistakes I have seen APs make. Most mistakes are just simple, common omissions; however, some mistakes can be viewed as critical or fatal in the eyes of an AP's principal or district supervisors. Critical mistakes can prevent an AP from being considered for promotions and label an AP as someone with questionable decision making skills. Participants in this project were asked about mistakes that they made or have observed other administrators make over time. Several examples shared could be viewed as mistakes that could hinder AP promotion opportunities. This section examined research questions one and three as it examined the impact that mistakes can have on an AP's chances of attaining the principalship. Both APs and district leaders provided insights into events that could be viewed as mistakes,

which would influence an AP's opportunity for the principalship. The perceived influence of AP mistakes were explored in the context of the following topics: relationship with principal; communication; professionalism; parent interactions; response to disappointment; setbacks; wanting the fast track; apathy; and resentment.

Maintaining a positive relationship with principal. The relationship that an AP has with his or her principal can be a determining factor in future opportunities for a principal position. APs who challenge the principal or who do not openly and publicly support the principal can be perceived as a threat. In addition, district level leaders always ask the principal about the leadership potential of the AP. If the principal-AP relationship is not strong, then the chances for promotion can be damaged.

Several AP participants expressed struggles and challenges within their relationship with their principal. AP Moore felt that sometimes APs are judged based on the relationship the AP has with the principal.

I think sometimes this job, the perception that higher officials have of you a lot of times relates to the reflection of the principal that you work for, so nobody's under the illusion that there is a perfect principal out there and everybody has their flaws, and I certainly have mine, but I think sometimes there are principals who may not put their assistant principals in the best light. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

As an AP that has served under multiple principals, Moore has had experiences where she was not involved in decisions and felt like her job was more secretarial than leader. This working relationship created resentment in AP Moore as evidenced in her quote below.

I felt under one principal that I was a glorified administrative assistant. I did my normal activities but I was not involved in key decision making, I did have some quote unquote thrown under the bus moments, and I think part of that was I had been with this staff for three years and this particular principal had come in new and maybe that was a little bit of a threat, I already had a rapport in the community, I already had a rapport with the staff. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Richards also has experienced a strained relationship with his principal.

Richards has received information in the past from his principal that fueled speculation about Richards's potential job opportunities. When those rumors did not come to fruition, frustration developed.

My principal knows he's been part of the problem in terms of he's telling what he's heard from community or board members, or—and he realizes he's sort of fed these (rumors) stuff that didn't pan out that he really thought was gonna pan out. So he had backed off ever talking to me about it, we don't talk, we talk very little. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

AP Owens also addressed some resentment that she has experienced with her principal. Resentment developed when the AP didn't feel the principal was working as hard as her or when the principal was unwilling to assist with certain responsibilities such as duties and discipline. AP Owens did not feel as if she was valued or seen as a partner by her principal. In addition, resentment developed when Owens felt like the principal should be able to figure some things out as a principal.

I believe, just based on my experience, that when you get dissension it's about not feeling that you have an equal partnership, not feeling that that person is putting in that time or that you're having to help them through things that you feel like if they're in that leadership role they should be able to figure out on their own. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Owens described the relationship with the principal below. This description certainly indicates a damaged relationship between the principal and the AP.

I've worked for people who had kind of like a princess mentality where they were never gonna go check that head for lice or get in the cafeteria and serve the food or do whatever, and so for me the biggest thing that I'm taking away from all my past years' experience is when you show that mentality it makes everything in your building different. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Participant Apple recalled a story in which an AP friend had a strained relationship with the principal. The principal would not let the AP help with problems and also would not allow the AP to speak publicly in front of parents. Apple also shared that she has worked with a principal that did not share the same values as Apple and it created tension within the school,

Friend of mine that's at an elementary school asked doesn't your custodial team have a plan to clean the cafeteria every day? and I said yes, she said we don't have that here, she wants to take the initiative, make a plan so that the cafeteria gets mopped every day. But her principal won't let her be a part of that. I have heard of situations where assistant principals aren't allowed to speak in front of groups of parents because the principal's the principal and they're the one that's gonna talk.

I was operating out of a different set of values than the principal and so I hadn't quite learned how to navigate that. [And did that create frustration for you?] Oh, absolutely, but it's like I said earlier, it was just finding ways to channel that and play the game, so to speak, and do what was expected while being true to what I felt like needed to be done, too. (Olivia Apple, Principal, Vernon)

These examples certainly indicate that an unhealthy AP/principal relationship can be detrimental to the future progression opportunities for APs. Unfortunately, as the AP, it is the responsibility of the AP to figure out how to improve the relationship, especially

if it is a damaged relationship. If the AP acts in a manner that further alienates the relationship (through words or actions), it can certainly further damage the relationship and thus damage potential opportunities for the principalship.

District role in repairing relationships. Districts have a major role in helping to repair damaged relationships. Often the issue may not solely rest with the AP. Just as it takes two people to argue, responsibility often rests with both the AP and principal. As a result, the district should have a plan in place to help improve these situations.

Superintendent Roarke discussed building relationships with principals.

What I try to do is build a strong relationship with my principals. I feel like, personally, that's the, I was a principal at three different, an elementary and two high schools and then an AP at a middle school, so I guess I have a lot of experience in that role and I try to, I try to see it from their side, so yeah, I'm a superintendent but I'm a principal advocate, too, so anyway, long story short, I try to build a relationship, so even when I go out here for these mid-year evaluations, a lot of it is about just me sitting down, talking to them, we bring out their commitment to excellence surveys, we discuss the strengths, the things that people are feeling really good about, we look at other areas. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke County)

By sharing data and having conversations, district leaders can get a sense of any potential issues and work to correct those for principals and APs. Assistant Superintendent Adkins stated that the superintendent is going to hold principals responsible for issues with APs. By holding the principal accountable, it reinforces the need to create a positive working relationship with APs.

The superintendent is going to hold the principal accountable for what goes on in that building. If a AP makes a mistake, the superintendent is not going to be addressing that with the AP, to a certain extent, the superintendent will be addressing that with the principal. I do know of situations that have occurred in

different districts in which superintendents have had to get involved in situations where the AP and the principal do not get along and it causes an unhealthy situation in the school, but yet the superintendent holds the principal accountable for what goes on in that school. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

APs in this study have indicated that often they are not given the types of experiences that they feel they need to be ready for the principalship. Districts can instruct principals to share all elements of the principalship with the AP. Participant Barker discussed how he shared all aspects of school administration with his APs. If districts mandated principals do the same, it could eliminate some issues that result in damaged relationships.

APs also have a responsibility to understand their role and be open to feedback. As AP, you are working for the principal. The principal is the leader of the school, and the AP should support the principal and his or her vision for where the school should go. If APs are not willing to serve their role and support the principal, then often issues will arise. Human Resource Director Carter speaks from experience as an AP and also now from a human resources perspective.

As an assistant principal, you have to be open-minded and be willing to get that feedback from the principal to develop those leadership and problem-solving skills. Principals have developed and have learned and acquired those skills a little more. But you know, as an assistant principal you're always given the jobs that the principal doesn't want to do, but you have to be open to learn new things. (Carolyn Carter, Director of Human Resources, Liberty)

Superintendent Roarke ultimately believes that APs have to know their role and accept it; actively working against the principal is a major trap that APs can fall into.

APs, they have to know their role, it's as plain and simple as that but it's up to the principal to define that role and if the principal hasn't clearly defined that role then the AP needs to ask. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Roarke ultimately accepts responsibility if there are issues. He feels it is his role to resolve any conflicts; however, as the superintendent he feels he has to support the principal and trust the principal. This is important for APs to understand. Going to district officials to complain especially in absence of any ethical, illegal or immoral issues usually works against the AP.

Well ultimately it's our responsibility to understand the climate of our schools and if the climate's not right at the top or the bottom or the middle, it, you know, it's really, it's still our responsibility to make sure it is right. I feel like for the, almost without a doubt that it's right and—I can think of one position, one situation that it's not right, and there needs to be some work done, but you have to—you know, I have to trust the principal and I have to trust the principal's professional opinion of that person. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Loyalty and trust. Strong relationships are founded on loyalty and trust. Often when relationships become damaged, it is because one party feels that trust has been betrayed. The district leaders discussed the importance of loyalty and trust in the AP/principal relationship. Superintendent Roarke stated that a part of loyalty is being able to listen first and act second.

Loyalty, someone that can listen first, act second, someone that's a leader but being a loyal leader, they cannot overshadow or, they can't overshadow the principal. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Also the idea of not overshadowing the principal aligns with APs knowing their role. APs are not the principal and if the principal perceives that an AP is trying to

overshadow, then resentment can build. Assistant Superintendent Innis discussed that APs often are in places where it is easy to betray the trust of the principal. APs are much closer with teachers because of the role. Teachers often will come to APs to get information and if APs fall into that trap of sharing information, then they can damage the trust of the principal.

Elise: That's often difficult for APs to maintain that loyalty because that role of AP, the AP is probably closer to the year of teachers, more so than the principal and it puts the AP in that no-man's-land sometimes where they are getting the information or have information and others are asking them for it, it's easy to kind of you know, damage that relationship if you're not completely loyal with your principal, so.

Elliot: That's why it was my first word, because I think it's the most important. (Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent and Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Roarke continued discussing loyalty and the importance of APs being loyal to their principals. Roarke emphasized the importance of principals being part of the hiring of APs. Principals will be the one working most closely with the AP, and the principal needs to have a good feeling about the AP.

Loyalty is tough to determine. Here loyalty is we know our people, I mean lots, I mean we're hiring a lot of, now, you know, we've hired a couple of unknowns, you know, it's kind of like trust, you have to trust your instincts and you have to build trust, you have to build loyalty, but the principal kind of has to have a good gut feeling about that candidate and that's why it's so important that the principal is a part, a really meaningful part of that process and is hiring the person that, you know, their first mate if you will, because that's really kinda what these two people are gonna spend a lot of time together and if you've got two people that don't like each other, that don't trust each other or an AP that could be disloyal then the principal is not gonna trust them, they're not gonna want them to be in the classrooms, they're not gonna give them anything other than the discipline

and the buses, the grunt work, and they're not gonna help develop them into a leader. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke County)

Assistant Superintendent Adkins shared that being trustworthy and having high moral standards are very important in building a strong AP/ principal relationship.

Adkins also discussed the importance of having consensus with decisions and the value of coming privately to the principal if an AP does not agree or has a question. Openly questioning the principal or talking behind the principal's back is a quick way to damage the relationship.

I think you've got to have somebody that's trustworthy, that has high moral standards, their ethical practices, none of us walk on water, but you want somebody who's going to be forthright and do the right thing. When you say loyalty, if I'm a principal and I'm hiring an assistant principal, I want to hire somebody who's going to be—who will reach consensus with the decisions that's made, and will carry out those decisions, and consensus means that you don't always necessarily agree, but you can support whatever the decision is. I don't want anybody, and would not hire anybody, that's going to go and be stabbing you in the back, but I do want somebody who, even with loyalty, that's going to come to me and privately, if I'm the principal, and I want the AP to come and say, you know, I'd like for us to rethink this. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

Adkins also discussed the importance of a principal working to establish trust and even forgiveness if a mistake has happened. APs will make mistakes, but the principal that can provide feedback and then forgive the mistake and move on can rebuild a damaged relationship.

It has to be that trust has to be established between the assistant principal [and principal], and the assistant principal needs to have that kind of [strong] rapport with the principal. The principal should not hold that AP accountable for a mistake, especially if they asked and sought guidance before to try to keep

something bad from happening. But you've got to have that trust and maintain confidentiality as well, that's extremely important. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent Liberty)

Superintendent Rogers stated that damaged relationships happen over time and are usually the result of an AP talking too much and then gossip begins to spread. Rogers shared that often the information gets back to him (the superintendent) through board members who have gotten information about rumors and gossip.

I think that a lot of times if that has happened, or when that has happened, you'd really never know about it officially, it's always unofficially, and to what extent you really don't know, but you just know that there's, you just know that there's a funny smell about some of them, and that they—they're not doing what they supposed to be doing. Usually it's from conversations that might happen. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

Rogers also stated that sometimes APs also talk negatively about district initiatives and are viewed as not being loyal to the district office. Once these comments have been made, you can't take them back.

I've also had it where they are sometimes not loyal to the central office/superintendent and sometimes it's not necessarily me, but if we implement something the blame game is passed on to the Central Office. So, and that can be, that's the other damaging part is just kind of, and I don't know that APs think about it as far as damaging the superintendent, sometimes it's really versus a central office person, but that feeds uphill. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

APs Moore and Owens both shared stories where they made comments about situations and it got back to their principals. AP Moore was feeling frustration from the strained relationship she had with her principal and she let it be known to other school

staff that she was not happy and wanted to leave. AP Moore was moved to a high school position soon afterwards.

AP Owens shared a similar story in which she confided to a teacher of her own struggles with the principal's actions and decisions. Instead of helping the teacher work through an issue, she fed into the negative comments and it got back to the principal, furthering damaging the relationship.

It hurt my working relationship with the principal, too, because that person knew that they were coming to me when they weren't happy, so for me like in my career I wish that I would have been able to navigate that a little better for the staff to still feel like I was supporting them, but also for that person to know that I was there to help them to make things better. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Comments made by APs can certainly damage the trust and loyalty that a principal needs to have in their AP. Once trust is lost, then it is very hard to regain that trust. APs can be labeled as someone who can stab you in the back. If district leadership hears that description of an AP, they may be worried that if an AP does that to a principal, will they do that to the district also.

Perceived threats. If principals perceive they cannot trust their APs, then principals can begin to view their APs as potential threats. If the relationship is damaged to the point that a principal does not trust the AP's actions or responses, then the principal can begin to shut the AP out of some areas and leave them out of some decisions.

AP Moore shared the incident in which a custodian applicant was not hired after the committee agreed to recommend him for the position. However, the race of the applicant and his inter-racial marriage were perceived to be unacceptable to other

custodial staff. AP Moore was removed from the hiring process after expressing some concerns about the hire and in a short period of time, she was transferred.

There was already conflict there, I was—had never not been a part of a hiring process, and I was not told that you were not going to be a part of the hiring process anymore, I was just conveniently not on campus when they interviewed the next three candidates, and then I was not told when a recommendation was made to the board and I asked, I said have you made a recommendation to the board and I was told yes and that was all, no this is who we recommended and that custodian that they hired is no longer there, he left mid-year I understand, my daughter goes to that school. So I struggled ethically with that. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Moore reflected on that event and wondered if the principal had become to view her as a threat. It was obvious to Moore that an unethical practice occurred, but she struggled with the outcome.

Well, and it's frowned upon for assistant principals to speak negatively about their principal. And whistle blowers are not always coming out on the best side, and I have community—I mean I'm, my family's in this community. The husband or the man who was not hired due to his relationship with his wife, his wife is a close friend of mine, so she is not, they don't know. I've never shared that with anybody but my husband and one other. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Owens also shared an account where the new principal felt threatened by AP Owens due to the fact the faculty was close with Owens. As a result of this perceived threat, Owens found herself being left out of emails and decisions.

I think that they felt threatened that I had been there before and that the staff was comfortable with me, so then they like, I got left out of emails to the staff, like I didn't feel like I ever knew what was going on and then they were coming, it was just. I'll be honest, I don't know that I would have stayed in what I was doing if I had stayed in that situation for much longer just because it became such a—I don't know, like I didn't feel, I felt like that person thought I was against them but

I wasn't, I was there to help them but they were leaving me out of stuff and then I'd have to say like I, you know, I want to help you but like I don't even know what's going on, you're leaving me out of emails. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Upon reflecting, Owens stated she should have approached the principal and reinforced that she only wanted to help. However, things got worse and finally the principal told the superintendent that an AP was not needed at the school.

I should have just said like I am here to help you and I want to help you, I don't want to work against you, I don't want you to think that I'm in competition for you, like I know who the principal is at this school, I'm not in a competition to do that. I mean because that person told the superintendent that they didn't need an assistant principal, whereas the other school was saying we need her every day. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Both AP Moore and Owens experienced a damaged relationship with their principal; that damaged relationship ultimately resulted in both APs being transferred to another school. Both Moore and Owens now find themselves in better positions with better relationships; however, both also still wonder what impact (if any) these experiences will have on their future possibilities.

Summary. An AP's relationship with the principal is critical to future opportunities for promotion. Principals are charged with supervising and evaluating APs. If there is a damaged relationship between the principal and AP, then evaluations could indicate to district leadership that the AP is not suited for a principal position. APs must humble themselves and recognize that the principal holds the cards and the AP must conform to the principal's leadership style. As a first year AP, I was very disgusted with my principal and I wanted to be transferred. I remember having a conversation with my

father who told me that I should just continue to do my job professionally and without complaint. The advice to stay and not seek a transfer was very important, I listened, despite not wanting to, and after another year I was promoted to a principal position. However, if I had begun to openly not support the principal, my future opportunities could have been jeopardized. When APs do not support their principal or if they have a contentious relationship, then the APs will suffer if this is made public. District leaders are most often going to side with the principal and the principal will not trust the AP. This could lead the principal to seeing the AP as a threat. When the AP/ principal relationship is damaged, the principal will be less likely to offer opportunities for growth and other leadership experiences. APs must remember this and work with the principal to overcome any perceived issues.

When the district recognizes that an AP has a damaged relationship with the principal, the district should get involved. Initial involvement should include a conversation with the principal in hopes that the principal can resolve any issues. If the AP, however, attempts to contact the district office without first discussing issues with the principal, the district should refer the AP back to the principal. Damaged relationships usually involve issues from both the AP and the principal. Requiring the administrators to talk and attempt to resolve these differences is important for the growth of the AP as well as the principal.

Communication. Communication to stakeholders such as parents, students and other school employees provides an avenue for others to form perceptions of one's values and priorities. APs can make a mistake by not recognizing the importance of one's

communication style. AP Moore shared that she is an individual that speaks her mind. This outspokenness could ruffle feathers of those who hear the comments. AP Moore described speaking up concerning a district initiative that she did not believe was the right direction. AP Moore reflected that she is unsure if that outspokenness helped or hurt her career development.

But I will also say that my views were not always popular and I didn't mind that, I didn't mind saying what was unpopular that nobody else wanted to say. [But unpopular to teachers, right, you're saying or unpopular to the district staff?] No, not really to district staff but I didn't mind saying that what we were doing, that I thought that what we were doing was not right and this was why, but I don't know that unpopular is the right word, but I didn't mind to step out so I don't know if that that hurt me or helped me at all. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Moore also shared that she had had a tense relationship with one of her principals. She reflects that it was common knowledge that the two administrators did not get along. Moore admitted that she had held conversations with other staff during this time. This mistake could be a factor in the decision to transfer Moore and may be a reason she is still stuck as an AP.

I think principal two let that information be known, too, that she might not necessarily love working with me either, so I think that's possible. [Did anyone] I think people knew there was tension. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

My comments to another person were just that I don't think I can do this anymore. You know, I have to look for something different, I don't think I can do this anymore, and that comment should have been made to someone who could do something about it. And it was just me unloading my frustrations. I don't think that it's a critical mistake because I think that the central office knew that already there was some tension. And I think they thought, I think they knew that that would happen, but I think they thought maybe we could move on past it and we were not successful at that venture. [So what did you learn from that?] Well, I already knew before that that was dumb, but I just learned that regardless of your

feelings towards another professional you have got to, if it's not your husband you ought not tell them, so I don't, and I had lots of questions once I came to this school from people, people thought I had been moved because I had done something wrong but that was never the case. I really don't think I had done anything wrong, I had just made a mistake in judgment in what I had said and I don't think that it ever got to the central office but people find out about that. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Moore also shared a very impactful and emotional experience that involved the hiring of a custodian. AP Moore was involved in hiring a custodian and the committee was going to recommend a bi-racial man who happened to be married to a white woman. The man had been recommended for the position, but without any notice, additional interviews were held without Moore's presence and another person was hired. It appears that another custodian had an issue with the biracial man. AP Moore questioned this hiring practice and one week later she was moved to another school (high school as AP).

I wish he hadn't told me, that that custodian had an issue, the other custodian had an issue with him being bi-racial and married to a Caucasian female, and then I was removed from the process and was not told who was hired and then I was moved to my current school (one week later). I was upset and I've, I, let me say, I was told of the said issue before I was removed from the process and I voiced that I felt like that was unethical and that we would get in a lot of trouble for the unethical—you know, if anybody ever knew that that was a reason that that person was not hired and that I would not be a part of it, I was not interested in being a part, that my decision stayed the same. I was not invited to the next three interviews. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

One has to admire AP Moore for standing up for her values and beliefs concerning ethical practices; however, was this outspokenness a factor in her move to another school? It would appear as if it did have an impact on her placement.

Assistant Superintendent Adkins discussed some of the potential challenges of APs regarding their communication style. Asking questions can keep an AP out of trouble; however, asking too many questions can also have an impact. These comments can have implications for the experiences that AP Moore described in Roanoke County.

They shoot from the hip, and what I've always encouraged them is if you don't know how to respond to a situation, especially if it's a teacher comes up and wants an answer right now, instead of just shooting from the hip, tell them let me do some research and let me get back with you, I think that's one of the issues that they want to prove themselves, and I find this to be true of new principals also, they are afraid to that if they ask a question that it shows a weakness on their part. And I think the same can be true for the APs, and what I've told them, you know, the worst mistake you can make is not to ask a question, [Right.] in fact it shows that you're strong enough that you will ask as opposed—I'd rather them to ask a question when in doubt than just going off and making a decision that could be a—have a domino effect. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

Asking questions is important; however, the manner in which you ask and the tone in which you ask can have an impact on how you are perceived. AP Moore described that she is outspoken and not afraid to challenge and question. She provided examples of this, but what impact did that outspokenness have on her potential future in her district? Is this an example of a critical mistake? I do believe it is a common mistake that APs often make. Measuring one's words are important when dealing with sensitive matters. Once an AP becomes principal, the position of principal may allow for more outspokenness, but as an AP, I am not sure if outspokenness is always viewed as a positive leadership trait by district leadership.

Professionalism. Professional behavior is another attribute that district leaders assess from their APs. Can APs maintain confidentiality and can they promote a

professional and positive work environment or do they get caught up in the rumor mill gossip. Superintendent Rogers discussed how unprofessional behavior and negative actions can impact an AP's opportunities for promotion.

A negative assistant principal can be bad for the school and the district when it comes down to it, so, you know, most people, if they want it bad enough, they either gonna move districts or change how they are, when it comes down to it, because again, just like if I pass them over a lot, if they get real negative on it then they'll keep on putting themselves down the list when it comes down to it. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

Superintendent Rogers discussed some examples of unprofessional behavior he has observed from his administrators over the course of his tenure as a district leader.

Well I would say—said they probably, they don't mind letting you, they don't mind chopping off a toe but they don't care to chop off a foot, and they don't understand that sometimes when they are chopping off a little toe they chop off the foot instead and it gets beyond their control, they don't understand that a toe ends up being a foot or a leg, and that's not their intended purpose. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

Superintendent Rogers referenced that APs often are seen as a point of information within the school setting. Other staff members often approach APs for information and too often, APs share too much (a little toe), but over the course of time that little toe turns into an entire foot as gossip and rumor create additional issues. A good example of what Superintendent Rogers discussed can be found in a passage that AP Richards shared regarding a teacher who allegedly called a student a name.

The closest I could come to that was we had a teacher to call a student a bitch one time and the parent said, no he called her a whore and the parent said to me at a ball game, Mr. Smith called my daughter a whore in front of other people and

various other people and I—I tried to downplay it at that time, I said no, he didn't call her that. I was in a group of other parents. That was on a Friday night. Monday afternoon it slipped my mind and I agree that that's something that shouldn't have slipped my mind, that we've had a teacher, a parent, but you've got another parent, a parent you don't know what, I don't know if she's telling the truth, she's full of herself, she's a loudmouth, any of those, you know those people. The board met Monday night and she's actually a friend, a good friend, was at the time, of a board member, so Tuesday morning I'm called into HR's office and they say ultimately, I downplayed it, I didn't take it seriously, didn't take her comment seriously, a teacher called her daughter a—or from the board member, this teacher called my best friend's daughter a whore and Mr. Richards laughed about it. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

AP Richards tried to downplay this situation in front of other parents and staff members at a basketball game and then to compound it, he forgot to look into the matter the next school day. The parent perceived that the AP had dismissed the concern and even laughed about the situation. This event, that could have been a simple mistake, turned into a bigger event for AP Richards as the matter escalated and involved the parent contacting a board member. In the eyes of the parent, AP Richards acted in an unprofessional manner, and as a result, the parent complained to the board member. This example of a mistake could be another factor that has contributed to Richards being stuck as an AP.

AP Moore also reflected on a moment in which her actions could have been viewed as unprofessional as she made some complaints to other staff members regarding her principal. These two administrators were not having a positive working relationship and that information was shared. AP Moore reflects that she hopes that was not a critical mistake for her career.

I don't know if this meets your definition, I think that my initial response to principal number two, maybe not even the initial response, maybe the ending response, because I had worn down and I had lost my guard a little bit. I was not, I believe that you should be professional to the nth degree, but I think that in the last couple of month of being with principal number two, the stress, and I had been under some health stress, I had been out for the first time in my life other than maternity leave for an extended medical leave, I've never had to do that, I think the stress of that year, the stress of my medical issues, I lost a little bit of tact maybe, with a couple of my close assistant principal colleagues and maybe said some things not necessarily damning for lack of a better term, but complaints that I had for principal # two and I think that was misplaced, but do I think that that is a critical mistake, I don't know yet. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

Participant Barker reflected on his thirty plus years of experience as he stated, you never know who might be listening. Bashing your principal, your colleagues or the district can certainly create perceptions that an AP is not being professional or supporting the school system or district leadership.

You gotta be careful what you say, who you talk to, you start bashing the system, you get blackballed and that's it, that's it, I mean even if new administration comes in, you know, you might have an old board member there, you know, so you have to be careful what you say. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

AP Owens reflected on her biggest mistake, which involved contributing to the low morale in the school building. As AP, she could have helped improve the climate and morale in the school, but due to her own frustrations, she did not fully commit to the school.

I think that the biggest mistake for me, and I don't, I don't know that's a critical mistake that's like, I just feel like for one of the people that I worked for the morale in the building got really low and I should have done more to stop people from sounding off to me, even if I didn't participate in it I feel like I know why they did it, it's because they were—they had been with, you know, for several years and so they felt like I was their comfort, but I feel like it would have been

better for everything because I didn't, you know, it didn't help my own happiness in it either, I felt like I was going into a hornet's nest all the time that I didn't really want to be a part of and so it was like I almost wanted to be disjointed from that school, I got to be because I wasn't at that school every day, but it made me uncomfortable to come to work and I think I probably didn't put out my best work and I just wanted to be away from the situation. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Unprofessional conduct can be viewed as a career ender. Superintendent Roarke recalled how APs can also be associated with unprofessional behavior of the principal. Maintaining professional conduct is critical to having opportunities for advancement.

I can think of at least one situation where I didn't, I don't think that the AP did anything really wrong, but just because of the principal they worked for, they were guilty by association and had a hard time advancing because of that, and that was an unfortunate situation, but it was highly political and it carried a lot of weight and a lot of baggage. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

AP Ellis described a tumultuous period where her principal was charged with an illegal activity involving school equipment and funds. AP Ellis could have easily been associated with this criminal behavior; however, AP Ellis's professional conduct allowed her to keep her distance from this illegal activity, and she came through without any damage.

Our previous principal was involved in some things [illegal/criminal activity] that I very easily could have gotten associated with or been named in or—and I kept myself distanced from that, so I could have gotten involved in that and that would have been a career ender. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

Professional behavior requires APs to watch what they say and who they say it to. Remaining professional also requires the ability to keep some distance and perspective on the administrative role of AP.

Parent interactions. Assistant principals routinely have interactions with parents. As the primary person to resolve and handle discipline issues within schools, APs often have to provide difficult information to parents. One of the quickest ways to have a conflict escalate to the district office is via the communication administrators have with parents regarding their child's discipline infraction. Parents want to know the details and if there is a perception that the AP was not thorough in the investigation or if there is a perception that the child has been labeled due to past experiences, then parents can get defensive. Defensive parents can create frustration for APs. However, how APs respond to questioning and to parents who are upset can develop a perception of the AP with respect to how they interact with parents.

AP Richards shared how he began his career as an AP. He was always going to support the teacher and often that came at the expense of the parent and child. AP Richards acknowledged he took this approach to the extreme, and as a result, the perception that he does not listen to the parent or student has followed him.

I come in just guns a blazin', gonna support the teacher, come hell or high water, and I did that, but I did that in the wrong way. I would support the teacher, the teacher is gonna be supported, but I was, I was not very good at making that parent feel that they'd had a say, it was bottom line, it was this is the way it's gonna be, this is what the rules say, your kid did this, now deal with it, you know, that was, that more than anything has hung over my head. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

AP Barker who has had many years of experience as an administrator shared how a colleague's future was derailed by his aggressive behaviors and actions.

I've witnessed, and I think when I alluded to the example of a colleague stuck I think he went in like a bull in the china shop, and that turned people off, and once the word got out, [It was over for him, right?] he was finished, yeah, he was finished. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

District leaders hear from disgruntled parents when they feel like they were not treated fairly at the school level. These interactions provide district leaders with insight into how the AP will handle or try to resolve conflict as a principal. If the perception is the AP escalates conflict based on an unwillingness to listen or compromise, then this could impact a district's willingness to provide promotion opportunities in the future. Assistant Superintendent Evans supported this district view.

One of the most common ones that I've been dealing with recently here is interactions with parents and not letting the AP understand the position of the par—or the AP not understanding the position of the parent and holding, holding fast and not putting yourself in the shoes of a parent who has experienced this at a school. (Norm Evans, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke County)

Evans shared a particular example in which a student was pulled from the cafeteria line due to the fact there were unpaid charges on the student's account and the student did not have any money. The AP's conversation with the parent escalated a minor issue into a major issue.

A father was so mad that his child had been, had gone to pay for her lunch and she didn't have any money and she had to leave and go call her parents and that procedure of yanking her out of the line to go call her parents and how the assistant principal handled that call to the parent could have easily be diffused and it wouldn't have been a big deal, but it became a big deal because of the treatment of the parent on the phone and the call. (Norm Evans, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke County)

Assistant Superintendent Innis also described a common mistake that APs make with parents. She discussed not calling or informing parents of issues. If the first time the parent hears about a situation is from the student, then the family tie is usually stronger, and the parent usually supports the student.

Letting a situation beat you home. It's always worse when it beats you home than if you get out in front of it . . . try to tackle it and handle it and get parents involved before that situation, the kid gets home before the parents so I think, we've got some that have learned that lesson the hard way sometimes. (Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke County)

AP Oneil discussed another example of a simple mistake that became bigger. Students who were not testing (during end of year testing) were placed in ISS for supervision purposes, not for discipline, but parents were very upset over their children being placed in in school suspension (ISS). Communicating with the parents before the students got home would have eased this situation.

I think it was end of grade, end of course testing, it was some sort of test, ASVAB testing and those students that did not want to participate in ASVAB were, they weren't assigned ISS but they waited until testing was over in ISS. Now, there is a difference, but some parents did not see it that way. (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton)

Parent perception of the AP can shape how a principal evaluates the AP and how the district views the leadership and principal potential of the AP. APs take for granted the importance of positive parent communication and interaction. Being viewed as a positive leader who interacts well with parents is a window into how a future principal can handle other issues and work toward building consensus in their building.

Response to disappointment. Responding to disappointment also provides district leaders insight into the mindset and potential of future principals. I remember when I was promoted to a principal position at a middle school, my elementary AP was disappointed that she was not named the principal at my former school. The day after the announcement, the district was holding a major summer professional development session, and the AP was supposed to assist the newly named principal with the professional development activity. The AP was so upset about not being named the principal, she decided to not show up for the district professional development. That was nine years ago, and she is still an AP today. AP Hill shared how mistakes can be overcome by simply acknowledging the mistakes and developing a plan to overcome the mistake. Most mistakes can be overcome if we acknowledge it and respond in a professional manner.

The way that effective leaders deal with things now is they acknowledge it and they say you're exactly right, this was a problem and here's how we're gonna handle it, you know, whether it's a scandal at a university, whether, you know, whatever it is, that's the way you handle it, you acknowledge it, you make a plan, you assure folks, you know, talk about that the children come first, you make sure that everyone's safe and you move forward and I think that probably handles most of the things that are out there, but you know, just like teachers tend to get fired for something that happened on a field trip, you know, you'll see those every once in a while. It's been sort of my perception that administrators get fired for money, something related to money, something related to sex, and I suppose doing something that either specifically endangers or threatens or takes advantage of a child in some way. (Thomas Hill, AP, Axton)

AP Oneil agreed that being honest about a mistake and the response one has will quickly assist in rebuilding trust and credibility.

I think number one, acknowledging yes, a mistake was made, and true regret, and here's what's gonna happen to move forward and being honest about it. Now, I think the attitude the person shows goes a long way with rebuilding trust and establishing trust. (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton)

Assistant Superintendent Evans shared a personal story of how he responded to disappointment and how his response opened other opportunities later.

I interviewed for a principalship that I was sure I was gonna get. I had a lot of ties to the community and a lot of people told me I was perfect for it and all this, and I didn't get it. And when the superintendent came to me to tell me that I didn't get it, not only did he tell me that I didn't get that job but that I was gonna be moved to a different school, and my reaction was oh, that's great, well I—I taught middle school, that'll be a good experience for me at middle school, and it's closer to my home. That was my reaction to you didn't get the job and I'm moving you, and a month later he put me in a principalship and flat out told me that the reason he put me there is because of my attitude about his decision to not give me—recommend me for that position and to move me, so I didn't feel like I was stuck, I knew there'd be something else, and it was just another experience that would make me grow as a leader, but I've told that story to a lot of young principals and assist—well, assistant principals mostly, that so much of your perception is about your attitude toward things that come your way, and the more positive you can stay the better off you'll be. (Norm Evans, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

Newly named Principal Apple discussed her comments with her staff at her opening staff meeting after she was named principal. Admitting that there was an issue and learning from that mistake and the response after the mistake is critical to overcoming a mistake.

I told our—this staff at the first staff meeting I had with them, we're all gonna make mistakes, myself included, and what's important is how you react and if you're reaction is well, that was just a one-time thing and that will never happen again, you're not adapting, you're not learning from that mistake, but if your reaction is here's what I've learned and here's what I'm gonna do differently going forward and you have sort of a plan, even if it's something minor, that's, to me, that's the important part. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

APs are not expected to be perfect, no one is, but the response to a mistake or a disappointment is critical in helping others get past the event and also important for not labeling an AP as someone who does not have any future as principal in the particular district.

Setbacks. When assistant principals face a career challenge, the response is critical to future opportunities. Current AP Barker details his personal story of a career set-back that could have been a fatal and critical moment in his future as a principal in his district. Barker is retired from a neighboring state and he spent thirty-four years as an administrator and teacher (including several as principal and assistant principal). Barker is currently working in our state as an assistant principal and enjoying the opportunity to draw retirement and a salary all in a much less stressful environment. Barker recalled a crossroads moment in his career. His district was going through the process of consolidating several schools due to the loss of students in the district. Barker was approached by the superintendent and was informed he was going to be moved from his principal position at a high school to a principal position at another high school.

Now I did experience a setback at one point that was somewhat—I guess I was a little, I wasn't sure exactly why, you know, I was a principal of a high school, and the district went through consolidation, and when we were consolidated, the high school that I was attending, well I was principal of, it was going to become a middle school, so, you know, knowing that, you know, we were gonna have of course one less school, you know, a lot of movement among principals and etcetera, so I was approached by then superintendent and I was told that I would go to the high school as the principal, you know, because my middle school fed into that high school, and I said okay, fine, we talked about things and I can do this, you know, I'm excited about it, you know. But then two or three months later I was told I'm going to another high school as an assistant principal. And I was like what happened? What happened? Two months earlier I'm heading to the high school and now all of a sudden I'm going to another high school as an

assistant principal. So, you know, that kind of—it bothered me, because I'm trying to figure out now what did I do wrong. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

Barker had never had a poor evaluation and he had moved up quickly from AP to principal, having only served as AP for one year. It would have been easy for him to become resentful of the district.

I've been promoted throughout, but that was a setback which could still relate to that assistant principal. Why haven't I been promoted or whatever, so it took a while, but at the same time too, overcame my personal feeling, and I knew what I had to do, and I accepted the challenge, and you know, it worked out well. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

Barker further detailed that he entered the high school as AP and worked as hard as he could to be the best AP for that high school. Even though Barker was never told why he was moved to AP, his response to the set-back resulted in him being named a principal again in the same district a few years later. If Barker had reacted with animosity or been disgruntled, he would have probably not been given another opportunity as principal.

Wanting the fast track. The position of assistant principal is one of the most challenging and demanding jobs in public education. Having served as an AP for two years, I have personally experienced the daily challenges of the position. Because APs are tasked with many activities that are so far removed from their academic preparation and coursework, frustration can build. APs are trained in their academic preparation to be a principal, not to be a daily manager of often mundane responsibilities. This frustration and desire to be a principal can create the desire to get on the fast track to the

principalship. The fast track is achieved by some individuals; however, some who want the fast track take short cuts that often damage how district leaders view these APs.

Roarke and Innis (Roanoke County) discussed an AP that wanted the fast track, but made mistakes with parents and staff along the way. This AP is still an AP.

Elise: That particular person was wanting the fast track out of an assistant principal role, I want out now, how quickly can you put me in another leadership role.

Elliot: And really had only been an AP for a year and a half and was good but was so, she probably would have gotten eaten up by the teachers that would have alienated, parents that she would have alienated.

Elise: She's one that was so smart, she was very, very smart and very good in technology and instruction and curriculum stuff but she needed to learn to calm down a little bit, too, so she didn't alienate people. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, and Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

AP Hill has ventured into administration later in his career. In his mid to late forties, he decided to seek out opportunities as an AP. Now Hill wants the fast track to a principalship.

I've said to this principal and to my previous one, you know, here's what I'm here for, we know I'm not here to be an assistant principal for a career. I'm here to be a principal and I need, for instance, to know finances because you know, as an assistant principal, I'm not always given those opportunities and that's one of those hot button topics that can get you fired pretty fast as a principal, so I've talked—and he knows, any time I can be in on the finances conversation, I want to be in on it. (Thomas Hill, AP, Axton)

Often districts promote APs to principalships who have demonstrated great leadership skills and offer great potential. Districts sometimes even target APs for future placement. However, when other APs see that some promotions happen quickly for

some APs, they want that same success for themselves also. Even if the AP is not ready, they feel like they can do the job. Superintendent Rogers discussed some of the pitfalls of APs who want the fast track too badly.

From my experiences, you know, after about two years they're, you know, if you've got somebody really wanting to be a principal, they're probably not going to be a really good assistant principal at that point, you know, they—they kind of want it so bad that they start going against their boss or whatever it is, so it's more that they're actually too eager to get to it. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty) Well unfortunately you probably—there's no advice you can give that they're gonna listen to you, it's, you know, they probably gotta get burned or turned down or whatever, and you can't want it more than they want, you've got to let them, you can try to show them all of the roadblocks, and all that kind of stuff, but at the end of the day, you can't get too close to them because they'll burn you in their exploration to attain a position, you know, so you almost gotta let them settle and find out that and have a process in place that, you know, it's—it, they just gotta get burned a couple of good times, to be honest. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

As Rogers stated, sometimes APs who want the fast track have to experience the disappointment of not getting a position or being passed over before they will accept that they are not ready in the district's eyes. Feedback to APs as to what areas they are in need of growth and development could accelerate the growth and readiness of APs for the position of principal as well as help them to overcome mistakes.

Apathy. As an AP, when you are repeatedly passed over for principal positions, frustration can build. As the frustration builds, so does resentment for the job. AP Richards has reached an extreme level of frustration within the job of AP, and he is not shy about stating his opinions.

I don't know, I'll tell you where I'm at in my career, I'm gonna do my job, I'm gonna come in and I'm gonna do it, and that's all I'm gonna do. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

AP Richards admitted that he is not happy with his job. He is frustrated with dealing with discipline and the same everyday challenges of the position.

In the terms of am I burnt out, a little bit being here with the same problems, the same sets of kids, the same group of kids, no, I'm not satisfied in terms of the longevity of this position. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

AP Richards stated that he will continue to do his job, but he is not going to look to extend himself and look for additional opportunities outside of his assigned areas of responsibilities. Richards was also asked to participate in an Aspiring Principals Program sponsored by the Piedmont Triad Education Consortium. He resented having to attend. As an AP with over eight years' experience, Richards felt the district should know his capabilities.

They had an Aspiring Principals [event] and I didn't want to come down there and there's a little bit of bitterness or pride, I realize that, okay. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

Richards is frustrated with playing the game. He views the process of becoming a principal as a game, and he does not feel like he should have to play the game. Richards is demonstrating apathy for the position. He has contemplated other options, like going back into teaching and coaching. Richards certainly sees himself stuck in the position.

Yeah, it's about having an opportunity to talk to her or talk to him, you know, they know who I am, they know where I'm at, that's my philosophy. [Do you see

it kind of like playing a game, playing the game?] Absolutely it's playing the game, and I struggle playing the game, I struggle playing the game. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

AP Oneil does not see himself necessarily as being stuck; however, he also has been an AP for several years and he has grown frustrated with certain aspects of the job as well. He described particular frustration with parents. Parents who feel that he has more influence and control than he does.

I think they (parents) think we're more powerful than we are and a parent will call up about something, whatever it is, and granted, there's—I mean there's a lot that we do have control over, we can get help or support for, but we can't—we as site-based administrators cannot change the Common Core, we cannot exempt a child from end of grade testing, but there's just—with different things there's a perception that we have unlimited power and control and it's just isn't the case. (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton)

AP Oneil also gets frustrated when parents threaten to complain to his supervisor or to the board of education. Oneil states that he has come to accept this part of the position. Acceptance can sometimes lead to apathy in a job.

I'm mad, I'm mad, and you gotta do something and I'm going to your boss if you don't just, that scenario and again, not that we don't take it seriously, we just that, the way it's kind of presented to us by the parent. There's certain things that I've just kinda gotten used to. (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton)

APs that may be stuck can easily fall into a pattern of apathy and frustration. Realizing these feelings are present is an important step in overcoming apathy and finding ways to deal with this frustration so it does not begin to identify and label you as an AP. Apathy can quickly become resentment if not addressed and controlled.

Resentment. APs have a difficult job, and the daily challenges present many opportunities for stress. However, when the daily challenges are combined with the potential of being stuck in the position forever, resentment can foster for the job and the people that you encounter. AP Moore shared that when she has a difficult day and a discipline incident results in a student cursing her out, she begins to question her career choice.

I don't know if it's resentment at the position but it's definitely [resentment] on days that are harder than other days when I have a kid that's sitting in the chair and cussing me to my face and yelling at me, you know, and I think what in world, you know, but I also think this was my choice. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

In addition, AP Moore has experienced personal health challenges. She wanted a chance to go on a vacation during the school year. Her principal denied her request and this created additional resentment toward her principal and the position.

AP Richards has reached the point where he has decided to not hold back and to speak what he feels like others want to say but are too afraid. Richards made it clear that he is not happy with his job. He certainly resents the position and the fact that he has been passed over for principal positions.

I will say what everybody else thinks, you know, and I've tried to minimize that over the last year. I will say . . . what their true feelings are about something, everybody else will sort of hide that. I don't and I don't hide my emotions very well, I don't—my body language, you know.

I'm not happy, I'm not happy with what I'm doing now, I'm just not, and this is really the first year that it's—I still enjoy getting to work, I do, but I can walk, eight years is too long and especially doing my role. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

AP Owens expressed resentment toward a former principal who did not possess the knowledge that Owens felt was needed from the principal. As a result, the principal often relied on Owens to assist. Resentment built between the two and it damaged the relationship.

Resentment can grow and become apparent to others especially the principal and the district leaders. As Superintendent Roarke stated earlier, he has to rely on the principal, so resentment usually works against the AP in most situations. Keeping resentment in check is important for APs even those they feel stuck. If not, being stuck could become a permanent condition.

Summary. All school administrators make mistakes, and APs are no different; however, mistakes made by APs can limit opportunities for the principalship. This section discussed some of the common mistakes that APs make including their communication style and interaction with stakeholders, lack of professionalism, interactions with parents, response to disappointments and set-backs, wanting the fast track to the principalship, apathy and resentment. All AP participants were asked if they were ever involved in a critical mistake and none of the APs thought they had, although all discussed common mistakes they have made such as the topics addressed above. The district leaders were asked the same question and they agreed that seldom do APs make critical mistakes, but they do admit that common mistakes do form certain perceptions of APs and their ability to be an effective principal. In the eyes of district leaders, they can forgive a single mistake, but patterns of mistakes provide insights into how the AP would operate as a principal, thus limiting opportunities. Although there are critical mistakes,

(like the example that AP Ellis described with her former principal who was involved in criminal activity), that can ruin a career, most mistakes appear to be less severe and are more common in nature. However, whether the mistake is common or critical, APs need to be aware that any mistake and how they handle it can impact future opportunities for the principalship. It can be the difference between the principalship and being stuck.

Accepting responsibility, or failure to do so, is another issue to be considered in whether an AP does or does not attain the principalship. Director Carlson in Liberty County described how she has worked with APs who will not accept ownership on a problem or mistake. As pointed out previously, mistakes will happen, but district leaders want their APs to accept responsibility and own the mistake. If an AP is not willing to accept responsibility, it creates concern in the eyes of district leaders.

I call it the not me syndrome, I'm not sure, I mean it's whatever it is it's somebody else's fault, and it's, you know, instead of just okay, we have a problem, this is how we need to tackle it, this is how we fix it, if you have that blame or attacking others or being defensive about it. Put it out there and say it's not my problem, or yeah, I will in defensive mode. Be in defensive mode, maybe, but all of that kind of goes with professionalism and the confidentiality, probably all wrapped up together. (Alice Carlson, Elementary Director, Liberty)

Innis and Jones in Roanoke County also discuss the ability to own a mistake and work to fix the mistake instead of assigning blame. Decision making and accepting responsibility are two key factors that district leaders use to evaluate whether an AP would be a good principal. As Superintendent Roarke stated previously, APs are on daily job interviews. How they perform daily is much more important than the actual interview for a principalship. If district leaders do not believe APs have the needed

skills, then they are not likely to be hired, leaving them stuck in the assistant principalship.

District Factors May Cause Some APs to Get Stuck

Asking district leaders about hiring practices, addressed research question three as district leaders described the hiring process and what they look for in district interviews for a principal. As district leaders described their processes, they also discussed their perceptions as why certain APs did not meet their district standard for the principalship. Within this section, the following elements evolved from the data: politics; race and gender; sexual orientation and right fit. As Assistant Superintendent Evans stated below, often districts prefer to hire from within, because of the familiarity the district has with the APs in their own district.

There's a comfort to knowing somebody well and knowing their strengths from within—that's a great part of the process. (Norm Evans, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

Politics. District hiring procedures were consistent across all districts as it relates to their stated interview and application protocol. Vacancies are posted online either on the Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) website or the individual district website. Current employees have to submit a letter of interest and updated resume for consideration. Outside candidates must complete the DPI online application. In all participating districts, assistant principals interview with the school principal and an interview team. The principal makes the recommendation to the superintendent, and then the superintendent makes the final recommendation to the board of education. In each

participating district, aspiring principals interview with a district interview team, and then the team recommends one to two names to the superintendent. The superintendent calls those individuals in for another interview, before finally selecting a name to recommend to the board of education. However, as Assistant Superintendent Adkins stated, the good ole boy network, and other political actions, also has a role in the hiring of principals

Well I know I know of school situations where it was the good ole boys syndrome. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

Political motives are present in every school district. School districts are led by Boards of Education who are elected citizens in each district. These individuals have relatives, neighbors, church members, and friends who often provide feedback and information that shape the focus and direction of a district. Superintendents work at the pleasure of the board, so we cannot discount the political realm of school districts. As Assistant Superintendent Adkins referenced, the “good ole boy” network, AP Nelson also acknowledged the “good ole girl” network in this passage.

The good ole girl system that you know somebody, and she knew my grandparents. I was offered the job without an interview and they did not want me to come to see the school ahead of time because they were afraid that you would turn it down. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

Politics can work for or against prospective APs wanting to become principals. AP Ellis discussed politics in a small rural community. She indicated everyone knows everyone, and the relationships formed and the interactions are important.

I think their performance as an assistant principal is definitely looked at, and this being a small district, everybody knows everybody and what they do and don't do. I would say your relationships with community members, definitely your relationships with board members here I think plays a big role. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

Assistant Superintendent Adkins said it's not what you know, it's who you know.

As we were finishing our interview, Adkins stated that it is often who you know when it comes to hiring candidates.

The one thing we didn't say, is sometimes it's who you know and not what you know that will move you from an AP position to a principalship. And I don't think in our conversation for the last hour and 15 minutes that that has been brought up, but that, I will tell you, it's out there, and at times, depending on who it is, and the timing, that happens. It's—you might not be the best candidate, but it's who you know that moves you into that position. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

Current AP Barker reflected on his previously mentioned setback. As he tried to come up with a reason for his demotion to AP, he could only come up with politics.

Barker is an African American whose school was being closed. Barker discussed the demographics of his county and how some communities may not be ready for certain leaders based on their demographics.

The politics involved. Absolutely. And that's the only thing that I could come up with, because I—trust me, I wracked my head, because, you know, here again, and see the other thing with that, and you know, you talk about—now that was my experience, but I can see it occurring from an AP standpoint, not knowing what it is you need to fix, one of the other things, you know we all have a little pride with ourselves, you know, so all of a sudden you move from a principalship to an AP, and you've worked with this community for years, and now it's like what did he do, you know, so having to go through that process of, you know, people thinking well, did he embezzle money, I mean what—because let's face it, there's always the negative, you know, unfortunately. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

Barker was led to believe this by his interaction with a board member who told Barker that he was sorry things worked out the way they did. Barker has nothing else to go on. I asked specifically if he felt race was a factor, and AP Barker smiled.

I was never given the reason why, now, and here again, you know, we're talking about the politics of education and the possibility of moving up. One thing that I did learn, we had a board member, he and I, we had real good relationship, and he would come down to my school at that time and he would always tell man, I would love to get you on the other side of the county. . . . The same board member happened to be there, and the principal's and I walked in, and he made a comment, you know, I'm glad to see you're over here, and I'm sorry the way it worked out. And it led me to believe what do you know that I don't know? So that's as close as I've ever gotten to why did I make—why was this move made. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

Former AP Carter and current human resources director shared her thoughts on the politics that play into hiring decisions. Carter felt that it is the influence of the superintendent, who is often being influenced by his or her board members.

I think a lot of times politics plays a big role in it because—and it depends on who's the superintendent sometimes, I mean I hate to say it but it's true, but why certain ones don't progress as fast as others, in my situation it was more so that, I think it was more like, without going into a whole lot of he said she said things, but it was more or less at the time they were looking for a male. Now, had I known what I know now as a human resource director I probably would have fought it a little bit, you know, I would have asked some questions and raised some flags, but not knowing what I know now, I didn't know what the right questions to ask. I was told they wanted a male, what that had to do with, I don't know, because they could have easily put a male as my assistant principal, and I could have been principal, and then also, well just not your time, you know, you need seat time, well how long is seat time, is that one year, is that two years, or is that three years, and then what I've learned is with a lot of times, with the AP, you have to be careful what you say. (Carolyn Carter, Director of Human Resources, Liberty)

Carter is an African American female who was passed over for a male principal. Now as the Human Resources Director, Carter reflected on what questions she should have asked then in her situation, and she also reinforced that in her current role as HR Director, she does all she can to ensure ethical and legal hiring practices.

Race and gender. While HR Director Carter does try to ensure ethical hiring procedures, she also acknowledged the realities of hiring for positions and the needed balance that is often desired within school settings.

When I do interview panels and I provide the questions . . . whatever question you ask you, ask it to all, the same question. Of course, you can ask for more information if you need it and then keeping, you know, that group focused on what we're looking for and having those deep discussions afterwards before we say this is the person we want, these are the reasons and we take it to the superintendent and say well, this is why we selected the person that we selected, you know, having those tough conversations about, well regardless of what color they are, if they're male or female, if they're good, why not hire them. I don't know anything that we've done where anybody said we want a man for this position or we want a black person or a white person or whatever, but keeping in mind that okay, you know, we do need some black teachers, we do need black administrators, we do need white whatever we need, you know, even pulling in other cultures, too. (Carolyn Carter, Director of Human Resources, Liberty)

As discussed previously, AP Moore was on the interview team for the hiring of a custodian position. Everyone on the committee agreed on the best qualified candidate and he was going to be recommended for the position. However, racial issues were raised regarding the candidate and AP Moore was not asked to be a part of the additional interviews. In addition, one week later, AP Moore found herself transferred to a high school as AP.

AP Barker acknowledged that discussions happen behind closed doors and trying to dismiss that it happens is a knock to a professional person's intelligence. These discussions are examined deeper in this chapter regarding the concept of right fit. Barker discussed racial demographic representation.

I mean most definitely, and I say that because you're talking about professional people, you know, I mean we can read between the lines, so yes, but—and that's one of the things that I think you probably—well, I think those conversations, I don't think, I know those conversations takes place, you know, behind doors too, you know, I mean, they do, I mean I've had the conversations with my bosses, you know, about okay, female, male, you know, black, white, whatever, I mean because of the demographics that we're dealing with, and we want to have, you know, representation, you know, so I think those—I think and I know those conversations do take place. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

Former AP Carter discussed gender, in her experience being passed over for a male principal and how she views these reasons as weak and lame excuses.

I didn't ask questions probably like because I wasn't ever given a reason other than the fact that I had heard they were looking for a male and I mean I heard other rumors that they were looking for somebody with coaching experience and what, they were looking for somebody that, you know, just different, lame, to me they were weak excuses. And looking back now, I'm to the point now where I'm a whole—I'm a lot, I'm over it, you know, deep down inside I still like well how would I have been as a principal, because you know, that's what I really wanted to do, but looking back now I'm kind of like, now I'm kind of pursuing other things, you know, other avenues and what do I want to do to finish up my, you know, career in education. (Carolyn Carter, Director of Human Resources, Liberty)

Apple discussed regular conversations that she indicated happen often when APs are talking and speculating about who might get promoted in certain schools.

I have colleagues that are African American who he said he was thinking about applying for one of the open principalships but the AP there at that school is a black male and he's a black male, and he said I know they're not gonna put two black males at one school and you know he didn't say that in a I'm never gonna get that because of that, he just said that wouldn't be the right fit to provide the balance that's needed at that school, you know, I think if you work in this—if you can make it in this county for any length of time you kind of have to accept some things and you know what the deal is. (Olivia Apple, Principal, Vernon)

Female participants are concerned about potential gender bias that could prevent them from obtaining the principalship. AP Ellis shared that others perceive that females can't be the principal. She recalled how often parents will call and want to speak to the male assistant principal. She continued to say that females are often not respected, especially at the high school level.

I do, I do. I do, and I've seen in this position, I've seen the perceived roles that people think you have as a female and a male, so yes, I've seen that. Okay, well parents and students both automatically assume that the other AP is the principal because he's the male. A lot of times parents will call and want to talk to the man principal. That's what they say, no they want the man principal. (Barbara Ellis – Liberty County)

There is certainly the perception from district and AP participants that race and gender factors are currently alive and well today and are influencing which candidates are getting hired.

Sexual orientation. Another political factor that was discussed involved sexual orientation of particular candidates. Community perception of an AP's lifestyle may not have been spoken about openly, but it would certainly appear that the topic was a factor. AP Hill discussed the reality of community expectations for school leaders.

I think that community standards and expectations have a lot to do with whether or not someone might be hired if they have a non-traditional gender identity or sexual orientation. I've not been in on those conversations but community values are an important perception when it comes to schools. (Thomas Hill, AP, Axton)

Superintendent Rogers discussed two examples, one in which an individual did not become principal and another in which an individual did become a successful principal, despite certain lifestyle perceptions of the community. These issues occurred in different districts, but it speaks to the power of community perceptions.

You never spoke about it, so who knows if they knew that or thought that, or whatever, because it was not spoken about that that was their lifestyle, it was perceived in the community that that was their lifestyle. (Mark Rogers – Liberty County)

Rogers shared that the perception of an AP as a gay male did not stop him from becoming principal because there was strong community and stakeholder support for the work that this individual was performing in the district.

I had a principal who was perceived to be a homosexual, and that was going to be a barrier to that person, to him being able to obtain a principalship, and going into that process I wondered to myself would it work, you know, and we went through an interview process, they had huge support from stakeholder involvement, and they were hugely successful, but if we had—if I felt like if I had gone through a process and just named that person, they would not been nearly as successful because the interview team had to go through that and realize that that was the best person for the job. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

According to the participants in this study, political factors do contribute to the hiring decisions for the principalship. AP participants discussed the role of connections in the community; having relationships with board members or district leaders; and the

role of race, gender and sexual orientation. Often the perceptions of how and why an AP is hired or passed over are associated with the political workings within the district. However, many district leaders prefer to use the term “right fit” in finding and hiring principals. The term right fit was discussed in depth with both APs and district leaders, with interesting results.

Right fit. The concept of fit is acknowledged by both APs and district leaders. Fit is described by the district as the process of selecting the candidate with the skills and personality that matches the current needs of the school. Some APs also want the right fit for him/herself when it comes to becoming a principal. The participants that agree with the concept of fit, believe that it allows the new principal to be in a situation that promotes success and positive growth. This section explores the concept of right fit from the AP and district leader lens, respectively and how right fit contributes to an AP not being selected for a principalship, thus remaining stuck.

AP view. APs were asked about the concept of right fit for a position. Many district leaders discussed the importance of finding the right fit for positions; however, some APs had different views. As AP Richards stated above, he feels right fit is just an excuse. Richards felt that his license is a K-12 license and he can be a principal in any setting.

I think it's—I think it's an excuse that's used, ... but I think it's an excuse you throw out, if you want me to be a principal, you can create a fit for me, you know? (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

Other candidates had a similar view. AP Hill talked about the politics of the hiring process as well. If an internal candidate is not hired, then the superintendent has to answer those questions from the community and especially the board of education members. So districts rely on finding the right fit for each position.

If you don't hire the internal candidate there's a lot of politics there, you get to a small knit community and, you know, these aren't the—these aren't people that are distant, these are the folks that you go to the grocery store with who are long standing members of different organizations and you know, you can mess up your trust with a lot of folks if you don't hire that person that they also trust, even though they may not be the best candidate. (Thomas Hill, AP, Axton)

Current HR Director Carter shared her experience of being passed over for a principal position. She viewed the decision and the explanations as a lame excuse. That experience has certainly impacted her thoughts about hiring. In the end, the person that was hired only stayed a little over one year and left anyway. From a human resource perspective, Carter acknowledged that how districts use the term right fit can be dangerous, especially when dealing with hiring laws and ethical practices. Carter knows first-hand from being passed over due to fit, that possible issues can arise.

You know, I didn't stand a chance because I was not the best fit. I'm not a male, I'm not a coach, you know, I'm none of that, but I knew the school. Yet I still had to train [the new principal], pretty much show him the ropes and tell him what needed to be done. I was good enough for that, but not good enough for the position [of principal], so I guess, you know, being in HR you have to be really careful with the way you use best fit. (Carolyn Carter, Director of Human Resources, Liberty)

AP Hill acknowledged what most of the participants also acknowledge. Districts do often use balance as a major factor in placing and hiring. As Hill stated, best fit often means the person fits the demographic need.

One is that if you're a white male applying to be an assistant principal at a school, if the principal is a white male there's probably a good shot you're not gonna get it, and if I look at schools that are nearby I will name one that has a black female principal, white male assistant principal, black female principal, white male assistant principal, black male principal, white female assistant, I mean you can, you can—it goes around, so to some degree best fit may mean that you fit the demographic. (Thomas Hill, AP, Axton)

Current AP Barker also acknowledged the demographic fit as a factor when he became a principal. Barker is an African American male who became a principal in a largely African American community.

When I was assigned a school I think, well I don't think, I know, a large percentage of it was because I was familiar with the demographics of that particular area of the county, you know. So here again, I'd worked on the other side of the county some too, but I think that played a big role in that piece, and I think that being familiar with, you know, your stakeholders, you know, community and knowing people, I think it makes your job a whole lot easier in that people feel comfortable that they can come to you when they do have an issue, and you're going to listen and we're going to work to try to resolve it, so I think knowing, here again, it was—and it was, I mean I enjoyed it, it was a good fit. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

Other APs also acknowledged that right fit is important based on the culture and community of the school. AP Ellis stated that she would prefer to be placed in the right school based on culture. Being in a school where she fits the culture can be an easier transition for new principals.

We talk about that a lot here as far as when we're hiring, interviewing teachers, who would be a good fit for our school, so I definitely think that you can have a candidate that's very qualified that looks good on paper, that interviews well, but may not be the right fit for that particular school because each school has its own culture and, you know, I, I may not be the best fit for one school in this county but maybe another, so I agree with that. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

AP Owens shared that she went for an interview for a middle school and the interview committee asked her what her ideal job would be and Owens responded to be a principal at an elementary school. She was given feedback; that statement was the factor in her not getting the principalship, she did not want to be at a middle school.

I interviewed for it and he and I talked about it and I said you know, I really probably shouldn't have said that to you, and he said but if you said to me that that was your ideal job, he said I would have known that you were lying to me, he said so this, that's what you needed to say because this really wasn't the right fit for you, but it was the right fit for the person that got it. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Owens and AP Oneil agreed that the fit is more important to them. They both want to be a principal but in the right situation where they can be successful. Oneil stated that he wants to be a principal in a school where he can thrive and be successful. He does not want to compound the hard work with being in a miserable situation.

I think the right fit is more important to me than being a principal for the sake of being a principal. There are certain principal situations where I think I would just be miserable, be miserable in, and there are other principal contexts where I feel like I would thrive, so I think making sure it's a position where you're gonna be happy, you know, it's always gonna be hard work, it always gonna be long hours, there's always gonna be difficult people, but I think it's important for a person to be in a principal position where they can really thrive, where they see the challenges as opportunities and not just getting through the day, you know, getting through that pile of paperwork, daily pile of paperwork. (Eric Oneil, AP, Axton)

APs can view the idea of right fit as an excuse; especially those APs who have not found opportunities for advancement. It becomes an excuse, also when one begins to mention demographic fit, it can bring into question ethical hiring principles that may be based on age, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Although some APs do agree with the term right fit. It seems that APs who may be feeling they are stuck in the AP position are the ones that view fit as an excuse.

District view. The Roanoke County Focus Group provided much information on the concept of right fit, which was a major element in the study. When districts rely on right fit, but do not provide feedback as to what constitutes the right fit, and do not offer mentoring or AP development programs, then the idea of right fit becomes a source of frustration for assistant principals. This can create a culture of disgruntled employees who get frustrated and as a result get stuck based on their personal responses. Districts have a responsibility to explain the idea of fit and to help develop APs as they look for the right principal candidate. I think sometimes it's just so easy to dismiss the obvious, that there is a fit that districts are trying to match. However, districts have to be honest with people, and I think a major implication is the role that the district has in helping APs understand right fit. Timing and fit are certainly relevant based on the responses from district officials, but districts owe it to assistant principals to explain that, and to help them see that there is time and place for them. Failure to explain leads to speculation and that can get districts into trouble.

Well, the best candidate on paper may not be the best candidate. It, there is a large part, you know, I guess there's the science of hiring and there's the art of

hiring, and so to me you have to use both and as you look at resumes. I want the right fit. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Superintendent Roarke stated above that he wants the right fit when he is looking for a principal. He discussed the science and the art of hiring and those two combine to equal right fit. Assistant Superintendent Innis agreed and shared that her district has done a good job of matching strengths of APs to specific schools. Matching needs with strengths does have a major impact on the success of new principals.

I think our district has done a really special job at helping principals to find matches that are great for them, you know, even when we've had to move folks for whatever reason and it wasn't necessarily the principal's choice, I think we've done a great job of matching personalities, matching strengths and weaknesses, very complimentary at just about every place you could go. (Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke)

Assistant Superintendent Adkins also addressed that in his district they are looking for the best available candidate. Sometimes after going through the interview process, they do not feel as if they have a good match and they may reopen the application process or even use an interim principal until they find the right fit for the school.

We want the—we make every effort to hire the best candidate that's available, and I will say that there have been instances since I've been here in which we've had to reopen the application process because we'd gone through interview and not been satisfied with any of the interviewees, and as a result, we re-advertised it again and opened it back up. So yeah, we want to find the best fit, but we want it to be those things that we've been talking about previously, what do we look for in a AP or what do we look for in a principal. And I guess if you put that in best fit, that's what we look for. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

Although districts want the right fit, Superintendent Rogers also emphasized the importance of considering the diversity needs of your district. This supports the demographic fit of a school as discussed earlier.

We've never hired based on race, sex, gender, I mean, you know, or gender and race, you know, however, you always in your mind try to make sure you have diversity in your cabinet and so when the opportunity arises, you want to make sure you have a diverse working staff to be able to make sure that, you know, you meet all the needs of the kids, for example, you don't want to a male principal with two male assistant principals, or a female principal and a—and two female assistant principals. Now that might happen, but normally you have options available for you for you to make sure that either by rearranging your staff so, you know, by moving somebody or some other things, and, you know, that's a part of it, but you know, obviously that's not a—that's not the deciding factor, the number one thing is who's best for the job. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

Rogers felt that he has never had an AP that could not be a principal given the right conditions. He strongly believed that people need a chance to prove themselves. He does not agree with the fact that an elementary person could not go to a secondary school. He feels like leadership ability is the most important attribute, not experience at a certain level.

I've never known of anybody that could not be it [principal] under a right situation. It may be an alternative school that some people get a job at because they just, they—that's, they have to prove themselves. . . . but that's just pretty typical, you've got high school people that are perceived that can't go to elementary, you've got elementary people that can't go to high school, and until they're proven to give a chance, you know, you don't know, no one can't, you can speculate, but you can't know whether or not someone can or cannot do a job. (Mark Rogers, Superintendent, Liberty)

Districts want principals to be successful and they also want stability and longevity when they place principals. In small districts like Liberty, where there are only six schools, when the district places a principal, they want the principal to stay due to the difficulty in attracting candidates to the rural area. This view shows that districts want the right fit in placing principals.

We need consistency being a small, rural area, we need someone that we know is gonna be there for their students, don't start something then next year we're having to start all over again, and that seems like the trend around here lately, so definitely when we look to place, well not necessarily place, but find a, you know, a principal, is finding someone who's willing to be here for some time. (Carolyn Carter, Director of Human Resources, Liberty)

Roarke stated that APs who do not agree with right fit and are feeling stuck do not understand the importance of matching needs with strengths.

These people who are feeling—maybe feeling stuck, I think they also have to realize people that are making these decisions are trying to put—place people in a school where the needs, you know where, they're trying to match needs, like a personality, you know, the school needs this kind of leader or this kind of leader, they may need a change agent or they may need somebody that can, that is moderate that can keep things going or they may need a really strong curriculum person or they may need a really strong manager, it's very different for each school and now that I sit on this side of the table I understand it. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent, Roanoke)

Summary. These examples and passages from the participants indicate that the power of politics is strong when it comes to hiring decisions. Political views on gender, race, and sexual preference do come into play openly and covertly in hiring practices. District leaders do openly acknowledge the power and role of politics. During one district interview, a district leader stated we have been talking for over ninety minutes

and we have not yet mentioned that it is often who you know, when it comes to getting hired. Superintendents have the final say in recommending APs for the principalship. Superintendents work for elected board members who have connections and ties to the community, so certainly one cannot deny the influence that politics has in the hiring process.

This section also explored the concept of right fit from the lens of both APs and district leaders. APs who do not agree with fit believe that it is an excuse that is used not to hire them for a principalship. There is also the perception that fit could involve discriminatory hiring practices as well. However, APs view the term, they would be wise to acknowledge that finding the right fit is a common practice among school districts. APs would be wise to investigate the district's perceived needs of schools and shape their development in those areas to help identify them as the right fit in the eyes of the district or they may find themselves stuck. Reflecting on the district's needs as it relates to their own specific talents could begin to open new opportunities for the principalship.

Contentment with the AP Position

Being content with the struggles of the AP position is another theme that has developed within this study. Satisfaction within the role of AP is also a common element with several of the AP participants. Many of the participants were content with their position and willing to wait their turn in their district, instead of looking for job opportunities outside of their home district. Even though all APs have experienced stress and frustration in the role of AP, five of the participants discussed their satisfaction and desire to stay within their present district. Contributing factors to contentment were job

satisfaction; a rural district mindset; and faith, purpose and place. This section explores those factors of contentment and how they contribute to research question one which is the perceptions of why APs may not have attained a principalship.

Job satisfaction. Several of the APs in this study expressed happiness within their position as AP. The contentedness found in the position has allowed certain APs to be patient and possibly complacent in their current role. AP Owens has had previous assignments in which she was anxious to leave, especially the years she was shared between two schools; however, she is presently very happy in her position, and she is content to continue to learn and expand her leadership experiences.

I am currently very satisfied in my role, that's not always been my case but I'm glad to be at one location and I'm glad to work in the community I work in and for the person I work for. I do have a great leader that I'm learning a lot from and for me, I am a person who wants to get better all the time and she has just been a good example for that personally and professionally. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

AP Owens also shared that she is happy for her colleagues that have been promoted and moved into principal positions. AP Owens again related how she loves her home district and how she and her colleagues were raised in the county and are content to wait for their opportunity.

I've been happy for my colleagues that have gotten the jobs, it's well-deserved, and they are people, they are people who led in our AP group and I will say that. The last, only, the last two people who got a job were people who were leaders among us, so they were well-deserved. We just don't have a lot of jobs to get, I mean that's the honest answer. . . . but nobody leaves. And we've all, like we all were raised here, we all went to school here, I mean I'd didn't go to school in the north district, I was raised in the east district, and there's a lot of that, like people want to stay. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

AP Nelson is also very satisfied with her current position. She discussed the fact that she is focused on instructional leadership and does not have the daily demands of discipline within her current role.

I'm very, very satisfied here with the idea that I can be involved in instruction and I can have those interactions with the kids and the teachers much more because I'm not tied down to a revolving door of discipline problems and just putting out fires every day. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

AP Ellis shared that even though she is in a high school setting and she knows she does not want to be a high school principal, she also finds satisfaction in her work. She enjoys helping students and teachers and she feels she has a supportive relationship with the principal also.

It's satisfying. At the end of the day I feel like I made a difference maybe in five minutes with a student. I may have helped a teacher, it's satisfying to me, I feel like I'm being effective. I learn something every day. Every day is a challenge. I never get bored, you never know what's coming at you next, and I enjoy being here, I enjoy interacting with the students. I enjoy the high school level, the age of the kids. I enjoy interacting with most of our teachers, the administrative team, we work well together. I feel supported by the principal. I feel valued by her and just getting the feedback from the students and the teachers, that, you know, you're doing a great job, or thank you for stepping into my classroom and helping me out. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

Home community mindset. Another element associated with AP contentedness and willingness to wait for an opportunity can be described as the home community mindset, in which individuals love their home communities. Many APs described growing up in their home county and enjoying living and raising a family in their home community.

I want to stay in Roanoke County. I love Roanoke County Schools, I'm a product of Roanoke County Schools, they gave me a job here, they've supported me and they gave me an opportunity, I don't want to leave here, my family's here but I also don't want to hinder myself to say you know, so my professional plan is to aspire for an elementary school principalship in the next two to three. I better not speak for everybody but like I love Roanoke County so to me it means more to me to be a principal in this county and to earn that right than it does to go somewhere else and get it. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

Elementary director Carrie Jones stated that in Roanoke County 65% of the employees of the school system are home grown natives of the county. It supports the idea that individuals do not want to leave their home district to look for principal opportunities.

A few years ago our, we did a survey and a little over 65% of our employees were our graduates, so I think when you speak to the culture of our district, that's a big part of the culture, that doesn't mean that you can't be hired if you're not from here. (Carrie Jones, Elementary Director, Roanoke)

AP Owens supported the data referenced by Jones above. Owens felt confident that an opportunity will be available for her. She does not worry about candidates from outside the district. She felt that the district is committed to internal candidates.

In Roanoke County there's not a lot of turnover to start with. I do believe that we were all raised, we do believe that we're the best. Most of us were raised in this county, we are one of those rare places where the majority of us that are in K-12 education right where we're at, but I just think that some of us have a history to be more successful with where we're at and that it shows, it shows. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

The willingness to wait in a small rural district also creates an environment where the APs support each other. AP Owens shared that when other district colleagues are

promoted that other APs are happy for these home grown colleagues. Owens described how in a small district with just 19 schools, there is not that much turnover, so the APs are willing to wait because they want to be a principal in their home district.

AP Apple also supported this idea of contentedness in a rural district in Vernon County. Apple shared that there are no negative reactions when others are promoted because of the close community ties found in the county and the acceptance that it was not the right time. These themes seem to be common in the rural districts within this research project.

I just know when it's happened in the past, there's not any negativity. There's not been—because there have—I mean occasionally there are people from outside, I mean I was one of them, there is, I know there have been questions asked, well why didn't I get it, but because this community is very close and very tight, they do tend to hire from within but not exclusively, so you know, I don't think that's necessarily met with but it was my turn, why didn't I get it, you know, they're just looking for something different, you know. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

AP Ellis also agreed that the district is looking for a candidate that can relate to the small rural mindset and way of life found in her county.

I think they want somebody that can relate to this community, rural, small, somebody that is familiar with the demographics, and in this county they want someone that relates to that and understands that, and someone that will be an effective instructional leader in the school. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

Faith, purpose, and place. Faith was another common factor that was shared by the participants in this study. Several APs acknowledged the strong role that their faith in God has in their desire to stay in the position of AP and to continue to seek opportunities for the principalship. One participant referenced that their steps were ordered and that

reminded me of Psalms 37:23 from the King James Version of the Bible which states,

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and he delighteth in his way.”

Assistant Superintendent Adkins displayed his commitment to his faith as he relayed information about being passed over for a position, but through his faith and patience, he gained that opportunity two years later.

I've prayed about it and I'm just not going to accept it, if it was offered. He said you sure, I said yes, so he hired a lady that was out of our district, she stayed two years and she was fired, I thought well the Lord knew across the horizon there. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

Several participants have shared their willingness to wait on their turn to become a principal and the satisfaction and contentedness they feel as an AP. Much like those comments, many participants discussed their faith as it related to accepting that God has a plan for these individuals and they are willing to trust in God's plan for their career development. As Psalms 37-23 referenced, many participants feel that God has ordered a plan for their future. AP Moore and Richards shared their feeling about God's plan and path for them.

I also think about you made a choice, I believe that God has a path for me and he made a path clear and I think that's—that I'm on His path, so I don't really have any resentment. I love being an assistant principal, I love being an administrator, and I love that it's different every day. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

I'm a Christian and my wife consistently reminds me that you're not, you're there for a reason, we don't know what the reason is, so I think that has been very difficult, that's a part that has, it's a very humbling experience when you don't get a job, especially when you've heard for the last two months that you're gonna get it, alright, or that you're gonna be in the mix, and you keep getting that message from the central office. I do believe you're where you're supposed to be, based on my faith, but still I'm only human, the hardest part has been balancing where

does God want me to be as in relation to where I and Elliott Roarke want me to be. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

APs Owens and Apple also discussed their current place and their comfort and peace in knowing they feel confident that God wants them in the positions they have.

I think that I am where I'm supposed to be at this moment and getting the experience I'm supposed to get, but maybe that's just my religious stuff that I believe that we're all, I mean I just believe that I am here for a purpose and that that's—this is where I'm supposed to be. [And this is where God has for you right now?] That—that's what I believe. Yeah, I do, I believe that I am exactly where I need to be for what I need to go on with my journey. [And I'm sure that's very comforting for you, too.] It is, I mean I have a lot of, I just, I am in a better place than I've been in in years, so as far as like, you know, me, intrinsically, like I am, I just feel like I'm where I'm supposed to be. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Apple trusted in God's plan and timing. She felt both have come together to provide the opportunity for her to be a middle school principal.

I really believe that God puts me where he needs me to be, and so I've just kind of trust in that process. When this opportunity came open and the principal who had been here called me and encouraged me to apply, I was like, was not feeling it, but when the second middle school position in the county opened at the same time, that was very unexpected and I just kinda took that as a sign you know, there's two positions open, you want middle school, there's two open, you're not gonna have that opportunity again and so it's not so much that the timing was right for me, it just has worked out fine. (Olivia Apple, Principal, Vernon)

AP Vernon shared she feels the right opportunity will come; she specifically referenced the Psalm 37-23 scripture as she stated "my steps are ordered." Vernon further shared that her faith has helped keep resentment at bay for not becoming a principal sooner.

Bringing the spiritual aspect into it, I always feel like that the right door will open you know for me whenever it's supposed to open. My steps are ordered, so thankfully I feel that way, but if I didn't I'd probably be more resentful. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

AP Barker discussed how God helped him accept his set-back and demotion to AP from a principal position. Barker was upset, and he did not understand why he was being moved to an AP after being told his school was consolidating and closing. However, he described this peace that came to him one morning as he drove into work.

I was heading to work one morning, and this is probably, I don't know, three or four weeks after this move, thinking about this, and I got at the drive, if you will, of the high school, and all of a sudden this calmness came over me, and it was like it's okay, and I will tell you, from that point on, I was fine. I was fine. Now that's, that's what happened to me. [And you thought like that was God speaking to you] I felt like that was—yes, yes, that I'm telling you, I tell anybody, I mean, so and I guess in essence what I'm saying is just wait, just wait, you know, I didn't go out bashing anybody, you know, I knew my—I went in, I told the principal, day one, I said, I'm your assistant principal, and I'm going to be the best assistant principal you could ever have. I don't want your job, I didn't come her for your job, but I know my job, I know what I'm assigned to do, so that's what I did, and we had a—I mean we had an excellent working relationship. Excellent, you know. So understanding my role, and you know, here again, that calmness. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

Assistant Superintendent Adkins shared his thoughts on prayer and trusting in God's plan. He also shared that he feels like APs who feel stuck should trust in their faith.

I pray about different things and I don't say this very lightly, I think sometimes if a person who prays about it and the Lord knows beyond the horizon, I think sometimes people feel like they're stuck, but if they're very sincere and strong in their faith, you know, I think things will work out for them. (Howard Adkins, Assistant Superintendent, Liberty)

Summary. Five of the AP participants expressed feelings of contentment and satisfaction with their current role as AP. These participants all want to be a principal and all want it now, but they are happy with waiting for their opportunity. Although eight of nine AP participants expressed a desire to be principal, those that have found contentment within the position and are willing to wait on their opportunity may find that this willingness to wait may also allow them to develop their own experiences to ensure they will be ready when given an opportunity.

Even if APs are frustrated with not progressing to the principalship, many APs in the study feel content to wait on their turn or their opportunity in their home district. This willingness to wait contently in their home districts indicated the power and influences that family and community have for certain APs. I do feel that this finding may be common in rural districts. However, the longer the wait, the more anxious APs can become. As time passes and frustrations build, APs can find themselves getting stuck in the role of AP. While APs wait, other factors can begin to create a perception in the eyes of district leaders; mistakes can begin to identify and label APs, thus potentially creating fewer opportunities for promotion.

Finally, the research participants discussed how their faith has allowed them to be patient while waiting for their opportunity. As AP Vernon and Assistant Superintendent Adkins indicated, God has a plan for them and if one is patient and willing to listen to God's plan, then all will work out in God's time.

The Role of Disincentives to the Principalship

The perceived barriers to the principalship is a major focus of this study; however, often the barriers are both natural components associated with the position of AP, as well as self-imposed barriers that may not be evident to individuals who are seeking opportunities. The following ideas emerged based on the responses of the participants into the theme of disincentives to the principalship. The elements of this theme include the following: family; long hours associated with the AP position; low pay; personal health; personality; and stress. These elements supported research question one as they examine perceptions that may be limiting opportunities for the principalship and contributing to APs being stuck in their current role.

Family. Family is important to us all. I find myself working to support my family and the lifestyle and future that I want for my wife and child. APs are no different. They face daily struggles and challenges, not only at work, but also at home. In addition, the environmental domain of public schools often presents additional challenges that private businesses do not have to endure. AP Moore discussed the challenges of balancing the role of high school AP with that of wife and mother to two young children, all while dealing with a health issue.

I had struggled last year, the last school year, immensely. I've had some personal health issues that I went through. My husband is very supportive. I'm thankful for that and I have two small children. I have a three-year-old and an eight-year-old. My eight-year-old is a second grader and then of course my three-year-old is just him. My husband is a youth pastor. We deal with about 60 kids with his job, so how do I balance? Every second I'm not here I try to be with my family, I do not take my computer home and I probably should some days, I should take my work home more than I do but I just cannot because if I take my work home that's all I'll do all night and I'll work all night and I'll go to bed. Could I be more

effective if I took my stuff home, absolutely? I could be much a more effective administrator but I'd be a lousy mom and a lousy wife. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Moore acknowledged a real dilemma in her life. She is unwilling to sacrifice her personal family time at the expense of getting ahead in the evening. AP Moore and other APs acknowledged that some APs burn the night oil as well, and work consumes them. This can cause resentment in those APs who choose family over work.

I do think—there are people and this is my own perception of who do that in my same role, they take their stuff home, you see them all the time on social media with their articles and their quoting and all that and I think, sometimes I think, you know, I don't do that so much but then I look and there are benefits to what I am doing, so. [Do those colleagues, do they have families?] Yes. [And children?] Yes. [Buts it's a choice you're making.] It is, it's a choice, I feel like it's a ladder climb and I'm not necessarily, although I have goals, I'm not a ladder climber. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

The struggle for APs like Ms. Moore is in wondering whether her unwillingness to sacrifice her family time is hindering potential promotion opportunities in her district. District leaders like Superintendent Roarke from Roanoke County did talk about the importance of balance; however, he also talked about next level leadership. There are APs who have families and sacrifice family time to get ahead. Those that choose to sacrifice are demonstrating that next level leadership. In my own experience, administrators with families do sacrifice time with family in order to get ahead. This is especially true when supervising district level leaders do not have children and do not fully understand the demands of being an administrator and a parent. I had a former colleague and supervisor who were both single and both worked non-stop throughout

each evening. It created many hardships for me and fellow administrators who tried to balance career and family. I propose that AP Moore is correct in her assumption that family can be a barrier and thus a disincentive that hinders career promotions and opportunities.

AP Owens has experienced similar conflicts with work and family. Her husband is a banker who handled online banking for a major corporate bank, so when someone from across the world calls his number, he must respond. AP Owens also has a family and small children. Owens and her husband have committed to not working while the kids are awake. Currently with small children, bedtime is relatively early, but what happens as they get older and bedtimes get later?

I have a Type A personality and I like to get things done and do things right, and there are times that I can be honest that my job has come before my family. And I hate to admit that, but it's just true, and that's part of the stress for me because if I get stressed here, and then I get stressed that I'm doing enough for them, it just makes it, it makes is worse. My husband also has a job that he never truly leaves either, so we have kind of adopted a house rule that until our children go to sleep, from the time we get home until they go to sleep we don't—we try, I will say that, we try not to do computer, cell phones. Because when his cell phone rings it's something for work and when mine rings it's something for work and so we don't, that's just what we're trying to do. That's not always possible. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

Ms. Apple has committed to finding work and family balance. Since her initial involvement in this study, she has become a principal at a middle school in Vernon County. As such, her commitment to finding balance did not prevent her promotion, although her family's activities and her work responsibilities have impacted her way of life.

I think I've cooked dinner like twice in the past month because I just haven't, I think I was very lined up for wintertime and then spring has hit and my daughter plays softball and my husband coaches softball, so you know, life at home is much more scattered than it is in the wintertime, so I'm—being an administrator just in general, I have to—I have to personally compartmentalize and I don't do anything home related at work and I don't do anything work related at home. I very rarely take work home because I need; I need to be able to do it that way. Some people do beautifully with checking emails and answering emails until eleven o'clock at night. I have to cut it off and go home and be a wife and a mom and a church lady and you know, I have to just be able to do that. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

Even though Ms. Apple commits to not co-mingling work and family at home, the need to stay late at work certainly impacts the quality of family time she is able to spend with loved ones.

If I know things are piling up I will arrange to—and I will, my husband and daughter and just say I'm not coming home until 8:00 or 8:30 on Thursday, you know, I set up a time and I just stay here but I just, I have to be able to say, this is when I'm working and this is when I'm not. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

In the competitive world of principal promotion, APs can't afford to not take advantage of opportunities, because of the concern that another opportunity may not present itself. Apple addressed this in her comments, but she acknowledged the struggle between work, wife and being mom. This is a struggle which appeared to be a major concern for the female participants.

I will say one of the big reasons that I didn't move into a principalship before I did was the time piece and my daughter's in fifth grade, I did not want to do that before she was in to middle school, but just the way things happened, the opportunities presented themselves and here I am and you know, I'm glad I did it because I'm in a very, very good situation but the time factor of I gotta be a wife, I gotta be a mom, [Right.] you know, I gotta clean my house, [Right.] I'm still trying to figure that part out. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

AP Nelson was working in a dual setting in rural Vernon County. In her previous role as AP, she worked in two schools (dual assignment) that had very different leaders. Although she had been an instructional leader as a teacher, in her role as AP, she was strictly handling the managerial tasks. She needed a change of scenery, so she transitioned a position as AP at one school in Vernon County.

I had a baby right in the middle of all that and so unfortunately I didn't spend enough time with her but she was my, you know, just my person that kind of made me smile or yeah, I had to go through the long nights with her but having a baby was important at that time. I have a husband who has the patience of Job and so he was my venting person, so if I vented it was to him and him only, you know, I think that really, I was just getting through day-to-day and then on the weekends I would crash and so my own personal stuff wasn't even really getting done. Thankfully I had a husband who was taking care of everything. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

AP Ellis in Liberty County also has a background in elementary schools. As a divorced mother with two school age children, she struggled with the added responsibilities of a high school AP. In addition, she and her family live in a neighboring county, and she commutes to work each day, adding to her variables she must juggle.

At the high school as an AP—the part that's tough is juggling the family and the home life, you know, there's nights that you know, I don't get to see my daughters because they're in the bed and then I'm gone in the morning before they even get up, so I have sacrificed time with them to take on this position, that's really the only issue I have with it. If it wasn't for that part I think I'd be okay and some of the issues we deal with, because I came from an elementary background, some of the more serious issues we deal with [at the high school] as far as marijuana and fighting and sexual things we have go on, I'm not as comfortable with that. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

APs experience the difficulty of balancing home and work life. The AP participants expressed their frustration with the challenges associated with the job and its impact on their personal lives. The time commitment is a major factor that APs and principals face. My first principalship occurred in 2006, and within the first two months on the job, my son was born. My wife and I can certainly empathize with the struggles of juggling family and a career as a school administrator. I have often had sleepless nights where I think about the impact my work has had on my family. I know some of the participants in this study have had similar thoughts and apprehensions.

Long hours. School administrators are fully aware of the long hours that accompany their positions. However, the added stress and pressure that comes from the daily grind of an AP's responsibilities soon began to overwhelm. As Superintendent Roarke stated, there must be a balance that school districts reinforce to APs. AP Moore described the long hours.

I probably work—I mean when I taught I could leave at four o'clock every day, you know, there were days I didn't, probably more so days that I did but I could leave at four o'clock and go home and hang out with my family and be me, but—and then at the elementary level that changed a little bit. I definitely didn't leave at four and there were after school obligations and meetings and, different things that I had, but that was a drastic change coming to high school, you know, now at least two nights a week I'm here typically, but sometimes I'm here from 7:15 in the morning 'til midnight, just depending on the particular day and what happens in the school day. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

As AP Moore stated, and as I am fully aware as a former high school principal, the hours connected and associated with high schools does not compare to any other level. It is hard to have any balance when one works 7:15 am to midnight. Even though

that is not every night, it is a normal occurrence especially during football, basketball and baseball seasons. No one can blame an AP for not taking work home, especially given the late hours that a high school AP works; however, what impact does that decision by the AP have on how district level leadership views that person as a potential principal? In fact, even though Superintendent Roarke stressed the need for balance, he also discussed next level leadership and initiative are key factors he looks for in a future principal.

APs Nelson and Ellis also described the hours that they work as school administrators. Even as an elementary AP, Ms. Nelson regularly worked long hours.

There were many nights that I didn't leave until probably eight o'clock just because I spent all day putting out fires and then needed to get my other stuff done. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

I've actually logged [my hours per week spent at work] that before, and it's between 55 and 65 a week, and I don't do a great deal at home. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

As AP Ellis knows, there is not much time for any work at home as a high school AP, because you are rarely at home. She knows that she does not want to be a principal at a high school. She experienced being an interim high school principal last year and that experience confirmed what she already knew.

I do not want to be a high school principal, so being in this role as an AP, I know my limits, and I know that would be too much for me. I had to be the interim principal last year for about two months and I already knew I didn't want to be the principal and then going through that solidified that. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

Low pay/salary. Assistant Principals often find that when they transition from the classroom to the AP position, their amount of time spent at school greatly increases. However, as salaried employees, APs do not make much more than entry level teachers. Another factor that is concerning for APs is an entry level AP does not get a step increase until they have nine years of experience. Teachers who hold National Board Certification and a Master's Degree make more money than assistant principals who do not possess those certifications. The small pay differential does not offset the added responsibilities and time that APs find within their position. AP Moore reflects on the salary and responsibilities of an AP.

The stress level is significant from my teaching position to where I am right now, and I get paid the same. I got a raise last year because I should have got a raise if I were still in the classroom, so if I went back to an elementary school exceptional children and resource position today I'd make the exact same money as I'm making here today other than I work an extra month so I get an extra month's pay. That is stressful because I had—I have triple the responsibility, accountability, and stress that I had at a teaching level, so that in itself is stressful for me.

I didn't realize that the pay difference would be so similar or that the pay would be so similar but I didn't come to teaching to get paid and I—when I actually went back to school to get my administrative add-on I had a choice, I could go do National Boards or I could go do administrative. Well, National Board certification, which I could have done easily, well not easily, but I could have done it [Right.] with a master's pay is a pretty significant, [Sure.] you know, but coming to the administrative, it was a choice I had to make, I had to say okay, well I can go this route, stay in a classroom for the next 25 years or 24 years and make a good bit of money and leave at three or four or whenever I wanted to leave and not have the stress. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

AP Richards was adamant that he is not fairly compensated for his time as an AP. He lamented that he could go back to coaching and teaching drivers' education and fare better than he does now as an assistant principal.

I don't think I'm compensated for what I do either. I don't think but you know, I chose that, and I knew what I was getting into. I didn't like it when they cut us back to eleven months. I took this position, I could make more right now, I had my driver ed certificate, I could make more doing, teaching ten months, being a head basketball coach, doing drivers ed, I could make more than I make now. Yeah, that doesn't set well either. I don't feel like I'm compensated. I don't for the hours that I put in, you know. (Holt Richards, AP, Roanoke)

AP Owens stated that educators do not work for the money, but she does indicate that resentment can foster within the role of AP and when resentment is coupled with low salary, additional frustration grows.

I still believe that AP resentment comes from how they are treated from their principal, I mean you know, if you work for somebody who is working, you know they're working as hard as you're working, they appreciate what you do, they, you don't get that. Nobody does it for the money, so at the end of the day anybody who's saying that really isn't in education for the right reasons in my opinion. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

APs are salaried employees; however; they are not fairly compensated based on the number of hours that APs commit to the job. Recent changes to the state salary schedule does allow for entering APs to not receive any less than their current teacher based monthly salary. As a result, if APs are employed for 11 or 12 months, they will make more money; however, the increase certainly is not comparable to the increased work load in the eyes of the AP participants.

Personal health. Work related stress can generate health issues in otherwise healthy individuals. I can remember a conversation with my school nurse who asked to take my blood pressure. I felt fine, but relented to the nurse's suggestion. She informed me my pressure was approaching stroke level (180/120) and suggested I immediately go

see my doctor. One week later, I was placed on blood pressure medication. Several of the AP participants recalled personal health issues that developed or was diagnosed during their time as AP. AP Moore discussed how she was diagnosed with cervical cancer. The stress of a cancer diagnosis was compounded by additional work related stress that included a difficult relationship with her principal.

I had struggled last year, the last school year, immensely. I've had some personal health issues that I went through. I had been diagnosed with cervical cancer at the same time so when I met with Mr. Roberts (HR) I initially discussed, you know, can a principal say to a staff member you can't take more than two of your personal leave time a year, and then can she also tell me that I can't take five annual leave days, consecutive annual leave days for a family vacation. I did not say I was disgruntled, I told Mr. Roberts (HR) that I would do what I was asked to do, and if the principal said, and if he said that that was what I had to do, then that's what I would do and I would not complain. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

The grandparents would help Moore with the children and also when she had late nights. AP Owens depended on her parents as a support system for her family.

However, AP Owens's mother was diagnosed with cancer and much of the support Owens had come to depend on was reduced due to her mother's illness.

We have great support system, we have great parents, my mother has cancer and so she is very sick this year, so that probably has been more stressful for any—than anything because he and I do work a lot, but we've always had grandparents that were the majority of our help. And so for me, that's just been more stressful as just trying to find that balance between work and home now that I don't have my main secondary caregiver. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

AP Nelson recalled how the demands of the job caused weight gain for her and also how she felt immense pressure to get everything accomplished. So much in fact that

there were times that she literally spent the night at school; she recalled how she would spend all night, drive home and shower and then return to school for the next day.

I was maybe 175 pounds and that's not the case now. Well, weight gain was one because you eat whatever is available. Fatigue, I—you know, as I mentioned, I, there were nights I spent the night at the school, I will not lie, just to be—because you dealt with so many things all day that you didn't get something done and we were a magnet school, so. [So you mean literally you stay all night?] I mean literally stay all night. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

AP Ellis stated that since she has become a high school AP, she has experienced more headaches and weight gain. Many of the participants discussed that prior to their AP position, they considered themselves much healthier. Ellis was even a dance instructor. However, the APs perceived the demands of the job certainly impacted their health.

I have more headaches. I'll go home with a headache a lot of days. I'm not able to work out like I used to. I used to be a jazzercise instructor, but I had to stop doing when I came here, so I've experienced weight gain and headaches, but nothing serious. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

Personal health can certainly suffer due to the time and stress associated with the AP position. APs described weight gain, increase blood pressure, and major illnesses that have impacted their personal lives while being an AP. The challenges of maintaining a healthy and balanced lifestyle is important for any school administrator. Many of the AP participants in this study as well as other colleagues I have known also share the same concerns for maintaining a healthy lifestyle while juggling the responsibilities of school administration.

Personality (knowing yourself). The perceptions of others are powerful and can play a role in how others frame our actions and words. APs who are not self-aware and are blind to how others view them can find themselves being overlooked for potential opportunities. All of us are individuals with our own unique personality and our own preferences. Introvert or extrovert, outgoing or reserved, personable or aloof, we each have our personality traits that make us who we are. However, often we are not completely aware of how others see us and view our personality. Our interactions with others send a message; APs who want to become principals need to understand that perception matters. One's personality could be viewed as a disincentive to promoting an AP to the principalship. District leaders discussed the ability to know yourself, as Superintendent Roarke and Assistant Superintendent Innis state,

Elliot: Personality, so personality types and so, again, I'm thinking about a couple of people that I've heard the word cocky be used with this, with one, just too much so just tone it down a little bit.

Elise: But there—but I've got one principal that is so black and white and actually, he taught for me when I was principal and then he was black and white in the way he dealt and interacted with people, so sometimes that has hurt in some situations where maybe something didn't turn out quite like it needed to because he was handling it but just the way he handled it didn't work out. (Elliot Roarke, Superintendent and Elise Innis, Assistant Superintendent, Roanoke County)

Current AP Barker (retired former principal) also discussed the potential dangers of not being aware. Barker related an account with a former colleague who came into administration very strong and forceful. Barker related that when dealing with school employees, everyone needs to remember that the staff (all staff) are professional people,

and professional people expect a certain level of professionalism and tact in their supervisors.

One thing that I've learned, and you know, people are resistant to change, and you have to be careful with that and how you approach change, and I think with this particular incident the person came in and upset the staff and there was a pretty strong staff, very vocal staff, going back to the politics, so you got a very vocal staff, it just didn't work out, so it was some rebellion going on, so we had to make this move, you know. And here again, you know, it's nothing wrong with change, I mean we embrace change, but at the same time too, you have to be careful on how you start to implement you know, your change, and you go in too abrasive, you know, and you're talking about professional people here, you know. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

AP Ellis is aware of her personality type. She even shared that she and her current principal have discussed her need to open up more with the staff. However, this conflicted with how AP Ellis preferred to interact with staff. Recognizing an opportunity for growth is important, but acting on that opportunity is more critical.

I'm not here to be people's friends, you know, I am their evaluator and to remain objective I have to keep that line and not cross it, but it's really not my nature, you know, I'm a friendly outgoing person, but here I can't be that so much and I feel like it, it does make it easier to have those difficult conversations with them and evaluate them objectively by keeping it at a business level, but it's easy to me for, to me, for me as well because I am just, I'm not a, I'm not a chit-chatty person, I'm not, I don't like to get into drama and people's business and I just, I like to do my job. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

As AP Ellis stated, keeping one's distance can be a benefit when evaluating teachers; however, if one is not viewed as being friendly and approachable, that label can follow you and even possibly impact future promotion opportunities.

AP Moore, like AP Ellis, acknowledged that she is not a warm and fuzzy person either. However, through conversations with her principal (again like Ellis) she has learned to work on being more approachable and friendly. Through modeling by her principal, AP Moore felt as if she has made progress in this area.

Yeah, I mean there's always work to be done. I will say when I came into the assistant principalship I was worried about being warm and fuzzy for lack of a better term and I told the principal that I came in with who is very warm and fuzzy and very outgoing and an extrovert and she was a lot of things I wasn't. We were polar opposites, so when I came in I typically am down to earth, right to the point, I don't sugar things very well, so I worked with this principal for three years who was great at all those things, maybe to a fault sometimes, and she would admit that to you, and I—so the first thing I said is I cannot do warm and fuzzy, I will struggle with that and she said oh, you will learn, and I did. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

The ability to know yourself is critical to overcoming mistakes and making progress toward one's goals. Former AP Apple (current principal) discussed the idea of knowing yourself and most importantly acknowledging and acting on feedback from mistakes. These lessons learned can greatly enhance APs' opportunities to advance to the principalship.

I think the ability to know yourself and know when you've—not just what your weaknesses are but when you've made, like what you were talking about one of those mistakes and how you react to it, I mean I want to hear when I ask questions, I want to hear from people that yes, they make mistakes, but they've learned from them, and to me the reaction is more important than the mistake. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

Stress. Work related stress is another major barrier to the principalship for the participants. Many comments and statements can be associated with stress. Stress can

impact one's health. The long hours of the job can increase stress. The hours away from home can impact family and thus create additional stress. Managing stress and responding to stressors may be one of the biggest intangibles in determining future opportunities for potential principals. AP Ellis described her first stressful week on the job as a high school AP.

I was on the job a week and we had a—a huge fight in our courtyard before school started where we had four teachers get hospitalized and injured. I'd only been here a week, we had media here and law enforcement, and that was very stressful. (Barbara Ellis, AP, Liberty)

AP Moore discussed that she had stress at the elementary level, but it was different than the stress she experienced at the high school.

I had those thoughts (stress) at elementary school but at elementary school my stress level was curriculum, growth, making sure my kids could read before they got to the third grade appropriately, kids who were being neglected at home and I still deal with that here but it was, so the stress level is high, it's a high stress.

I also am nervous; the stress level is added at this particular position as opposed to an elementary position due to the dangers than a high school imposes. When I was at elementary school I looked for lice and pink eye and I had kids call each other names and you know I had an occasional thief here and there, and I came to high school and I'm investigating drugs, alcohol on campus, inappropriate sexual content on campus. I have a constant fear that there will be an active shooter on campus and a constant thought that there are 900 students in this school and if something happens to just one of them I'm responsible for that. (Lisa Moore, AP, Roanoke)

Moore's experiences certainly illustrated the additional stressors at a high school. All educators are concerned about active shooters on campus, but at the elementary level, that is usually thought about in terms of an outsider or intruder. At the high school level,

the increased stress comes from the fact that an active shooter can be a high school student.

Stress can be extreme at all school levels. AP Nelson shared her experiences as an elementary AP in an urban setting prior to transferring to rural Vernon County. The stress that Nelson faced daily caused her to temporarily seek a position outside of administration to get away from the increased stress.

My discipline problems were, we had drugs, even in an elementary school, you know, we had major fights, like knockdown, drag out type of fights, you know, we had things that gang related issues, kids starting, trying to start a gang in an elementary school, runners you had to go catch, kids you restrain to keep them from hurting you personally or hurting themselves, so totally different daily issues and daily stress that was very different. (Yvonne Nelson, AP, Vernon)

AP Owens found an outlet for her stress. She found time to exercise which is a stress reducer for her. In addition, she carved out time for her family and committed to periods of time where she will not work so she can focus on balance.

Our job is stressful, I mean it's a pretty fast paced job where you are responsible for a lot of things, some days are more stressful than others, I guess for me I have to have an outlet for that stress, and I have started in the past year or so that I have hours in the night where I don't look at my phone because sometimes looking at emails at night can stress you out, and trying to put more emphasis on getting my priorities right and making sure my family is not falling below my work. Stuff stresses me out, work stresses me out, but all of that stresses me out, too as much or probably more because you'd still want to be a good—I love my job, but I—you know, I love my family too . . .

. . . I work out, and that's the thing, you gotta have some kind of outlet with this job, I don't take it too personally, I know some people get stressed out about you know, whether everybody likes them or whatever, I don't—I've learned a long time ago this is—it's not personal when parents are upset it's because these are their babies, and as a parent I understand because there are times that I don't love everything that happens with my children either. (Lori Owens, AP, Roanoke)

AP Apple acknowledged the position can cause great stress, but she has found that talking to her former principal, who is serving as an informal mentor can have a great calming impact for her.

I am prone to stressing out and completely wiggling out and snapping at people but then I could—I know I have her, I can call and say this is going on and she'll say it's alright, it's gonna be alright and she's right, it does turn out alright. I think you do have to kind of step back from it but there are always very stressful situations. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

Apple further shared that the daily demands created not only stress, but also mental exhaustion. This combination of stress and exhaustion can certainly impact one's perception of the value of the position. The mental and emotional exhaustion not only can impact health but it also can lead to additional frustration and resentment, especially among APs and their principals.

I try to explain to my husband why I'm so tired every day when I get home from work and it's not physical exhaustion, it's a mental and emotional exhaustion and I think all of us that work in a school experience that, but when you're in a situation where you don't really agree with how things are going or the direction things are going in, finding ways to alter that without being subversive and without being insubordinate, [Right.] but also be true to yourself [Sure.] is difficult and draining. (Olivia Apple, AP, Vernon)

AP Barker (former principal) also described the stress that comes from the bashing that one can receive from parents. This can create emotional turmoil especially when an administrator gives so much of himself/herself. Barker described how he views himself as a servant leader; however, when that service is not recognized it creates frustration which can add to the stress.

I think one of the most frustrating things that I've experienced and that is, you know, when parents think that we are the bad guys, you know, I mean we're here, and I use the term service, you know, and servant in, you know, when I talk to parents and talk to teachers, and even talking with kids, I'm here to serve you, you know, I'm your servant, and to be a servant you've got to humble yourself, you know, and when they call and, you know, bash you because, you know, you had to discipline the child because the child made a mistake, then you know, it bothers you a bit, you know, because you know you're trying to do what's best for the child, you know, and you—when you're not getting the support from the parents, and—it can be frustrating, frustrating and stressful. (Ron Barker, AP, Liberty)

Summary. There are many potential barriers associated with the role of AP and principal. These barriers can turn into disincentives to seeking the principalship. The strain on the family, the long hours and low pay is especially a concern for APs. Perceived barriers to the principalship include elements that are associated with all positions of school administration. Time commitment, impact on personal health, and stress are all barriers to the principalship; however, many APs find ways to deal with these perceived barriers in order to fulfil their dream of being a principal. APs who struggle to find balance or compartmentalize these barriers may be reinforcing certain self-imposed barriers, which become disincentives to the principalship, thus creating frustrations and resentment. These issues may support the evidence that self-imposed barriers and certain disincentives can lead to remaining stuck as an AP.

Conclusion

This research study was designed to examine the perceptions of APs and district level leaders and principals as to why certain APs have not achieved the principalship. Not only did the study examine the perceptions from the two groups, it also examined closely the daily shared experiences of APs as it related to the idea that certain

responsibilities allow for quicker promotion to the principalship. Several themes emerged from the data, and these themes will be summarized in the context of the three research questions of this study.

The first research question asked APs their perceptions as to why they have not obtained the principalship. Although much data was collected, I have concluded that the following four major themes developed to support the APs perceptions as why they have not obtained the principalship: the need for—and lack of—AP development; mistakes; contentment; and disincentives to the principalship.

Both APs and district leaders discussed the need for AP development. This need included a discussion of inconsistent practices among districts in this study. The need for formal mentoring programs was explored, even though none of districts in this study have formal mentoring programs. The need for consistent feedback for APs in their job performance is another factor that leads to the perception of why APs do not obtain the principalship. The lack of consistent feedback limits the growth and development of APs. In addition to the feedback, APs also need to be reflective practitioners as they assess their own development and growth needs as AP.

Mistakes were discussed and framed as a possible factor that limits opportunities for the principalship. APs shared experiences and interactions with their principal that contributed to damaged relationships. These damaged relationships also promote trust and loyalty concerns between principals and APs. Other elements associated with mistakes included communication styles of APs, professionalism and AP/parent interactions. These elements can result in mistakes and missteps that APs make that can

limit their promotion chances to the principalship. Finally districts also identified and discussed elements associated with AP mistakes and the district's role in helping APs overcome mistakes.

The contentment of some APs is associated with their willingness to wait on a principalship. In this study, contentment can be attributed to the rural district mindset that many of the participants held in which participants were willing to wait for opportunity in their home district. They discussed taking advantage of the time to truly learn and develop as a school administrator. Oleszewski et al. (2012) explored the concept of AP socialization in the development of APs. Socialization of APs was described as the process of learning the roles and responsibilities associated with school administration. The role of AP is different for each AP based on the specific school environment and principal direction. Therefore, Oleszewski et al. (2012) stated that the socialization process for each AP is different based on their specific situation; however, the process does include the step of learning the role of the AP. In rural districts, the AP participants in my study did admit to this willingness to wait while they perfected their craft as an AP.

Disincentives to the principalship can be described as self-imposed barriers because these specific barriers are not germane to the role of AP. In fact, these barriers are associated with the principalship as well. The time commitment and its impact on family and personal health, the long hours, stress and low pay can all be associated with the position of principal as well. However, principals currently have the position that APs are seeking, so APs must accept these challenges of the position of AP and principal.

Barnett et al. (2012) reported that the top challenges reported of beginning and experienced APs were (a) workload and task management, (b) student issues, (c) parent issues, (d) teacher and staff management, and (e) curriculum and instruction issues (p. 103). Many of these barriers are the result of APs not being prepared for the roles in which they find themselves. APs experience stress on the job, and that stress can be compounded when APs do not feel confident in dealing with certain aspects of the job. Barnett et al. (2012) discussed how unprepared APs felt when it came to dealing with conflict among staff, students and parents. When one feels unqualified to handle a situation, it creates more stress and frustration within the job. These issues can create these self-imposed barriers that further limit promotion opportunities. Beisser et al. (2014) discussed the importance of healthy lifestyles of school administrators. The researchers indicated the size, scope and importance of the work of school administrators is too large to have unhealthy individuals accomplish the needed work. APs who are unable to find balance in the work of school administration will become frustrated, resentful and unhealthy.

The second research question focused on APs' perceptions of the shared daily responsibilities that might promote ascension to the principalship. The following theme developed from the data: experiences needed for the principalship and contained sub themes consisting of the following: shared managerial aspects of the position; instructional leadership; and budget. The managerial aspects of the position were well supported by the AP participants in my study. APs discussed the challenges of bus duty, discipline, supervisory activities, and testing. APs described bus duty as a rite of passage.

Each new AP has to go through the process of dealing with buses, drivers and the dreaded bus substitute. AP participants at the secondary level were certainly concerned that the managerial aspects associated with secondary schools were preventing them from other opportunities. In addition, the work at the secondary level created additional stress and pressure associated with the extra time and hours spent on the job.

However, Oleszewski et al. (2012) reported that roles and responsibilities of APs vary based on the individual principal's assignments to the AP. This fact creates much variability in the position of AP. Some APs may find they are exempt from certain managerial aspects. AP Ellis admitted that her male AP colleague is assigned more of the discipline and sometimes more of the athletic supervision. AP Richards also agreed with Ellis' statement. Richards feels he has been labeled as the disciplinarian and the athletic director. Oleszewski et al. (2012) discussed these managerial roles associated with APs, indicating that although APs do have to maintain the "buses, books and butts" within schools, the major focus is on instructional leadership. APs who are associated with the managerial aspects of the position must actively seek out additional opportunities to demonstrate instructional leadership; however, this creates resentment among APs because they do not want to take on extra responsibilities.

Instructional leadership is the primary role of the principal; however, the increased importance of instructional leadership has allowed APs to assume more opportunities to display their own instructional leadership skills. Oleszewski et al. (2012) described the common roles of an instructional leader as one who coaches teachers, evaluates instructional methods and practices and uses data to inform decisions (p. 277).

In short, instructional leadership skills directly impact teaching and learning in schools. When APs are primarily focused on discipline, supervision, buses, and other managerial aspects, they lose the chance to grow and develop instructional leadership skills. This absence of opportunity can promote an AP's feelings of being stuck as AP.

The third research question explored the perceptions of district level leaders and principals as to why certain APs have not obtained the principalship. This research question addressed these themes from the data: next level leadership; the need for – or lack of - AP development; mistakes; and district hiring practices including the concepts of politics and fit (AP development and mistakes were previously discussed above).

Both AP and district participants acknowledged the power of politics as it related to hiring practices of APs. The power of politics supports two of the research questions as both APs and district leaders were asked about these perceptions. AP Ellis and HR Director Carter both shared comments regarding the politics of gender. Both have experienced events where their gender was discussed within the scope of their position as school administrator. Parylo, Zepeda, and Bengtson (2013) discussed gender and the principalship in their article. Parylo et al. report that females experience more challenges along their career path than males do, largely due to organizational and social factors (p. 567).

The concept of fit can also imply political interaction in district's hiring practices. Tooms, Lugg, and Bogotch (2010) question the concept of fit, indicating that fit includes social constructionism, identity theory and hegemony. Tooms et al. (2010) describe the combination of these three issues to a complex mechanical watch that requires all

components to work to achieve the desired result. However, fit is often difficult to fully describe and detail. Tooms et al. (2010) describe fit: “to some extent, fit is both understood and yet indescribable to those who frequently invoke the word” (p. 101).

When district leaders use the term fit, it is hard for them to describe or define what the right fit looks like. It is more of a gut feeling that they know when they see it. Tooms et al. (2010) call for specific measures or criteria for fit. Without these specific criteria, the right fit has no validity in hiring and is strictly a political endeavor. My research question attempted to allow districts to dismiss or address hegemonic practices; however, I am not sure that was accomplished. I do believe that for APs who are stuck, the right fit is nothing more than lip service. APs who are stuck need a specific list of criteria that districts want from the principal position. Districts could qualify what next level leadership involves and include these criteria to prospective APs. This would legitimize the use of the word fit and also allow APs to assess their current standing on the next level ladder.

Stuck

The major themes in this research align with the phenomenon of being stuck. The concept of being stuck is not found within the literature; however, several connections can be made in terms of barriers to obtaining the principalship. Exposure to next level leadership skills, instructional leadership, balancing the pressures of the job, understanding the roles of APs, and mistakes are all components that can lead to being stuck. APs are reluctant to acknowledge the possibility of being stuck. Of the participants in this study, only one would openly admit that he was stuck. AP Richards

acknowledged that he is stuck and he also now acknowledged that his response to disappointment and his reluctance to seek out opportunities have been factors in him being stuck as AP.

The concept of being stuck in any situation connects negative feelings and experiences. APs naturally do not want to view themselves as being stuck in the position. Being stuck implies that they have lost any hope for ever becoming a principal and realizing their dream that started when they first decided to pursue a degree in administration. Admitting that you are stuck almost implies that all hope is lost. However, much like a car gets stuck in snow or mud, when the snow melts and the mud dries up, the car can become unstuck. My hope is that APs who are stuck can learn to admit they are stuck and begin to formulate a plan to get unstuck.

Summary. APs begin to feel stuck when they do not progress to the principalship within the timeframe that they have set for themselves. There are many factors that can lead an AP to believe they are stuck, including the specific job responsibilities they have as an AP, their school assignment, their relationship with the principalship, and the length of time spent as an AP. Figure 2 illustrates the primary themes within this research as well as the opportunities to get stuck, if APs do not navigate the path to the principalship. However, what is most important for APs to understand is does the district view the AP as being stuck. If the district feels an AP does not have the capacity or skill needed to be a principal, then that is when an AP actually becomes stuck. Districts who still feel that there can be an opportunity for an AP, given the right fit and placement, should inform APs and provide feedback to APs so apathy

and resentment do not develop within the AP. APs should also be willing to reflect on their personal circumstances and seek feedback if they perceive they are stuck. Moving forward the next chapter will address my recommendations based on the data from this research.

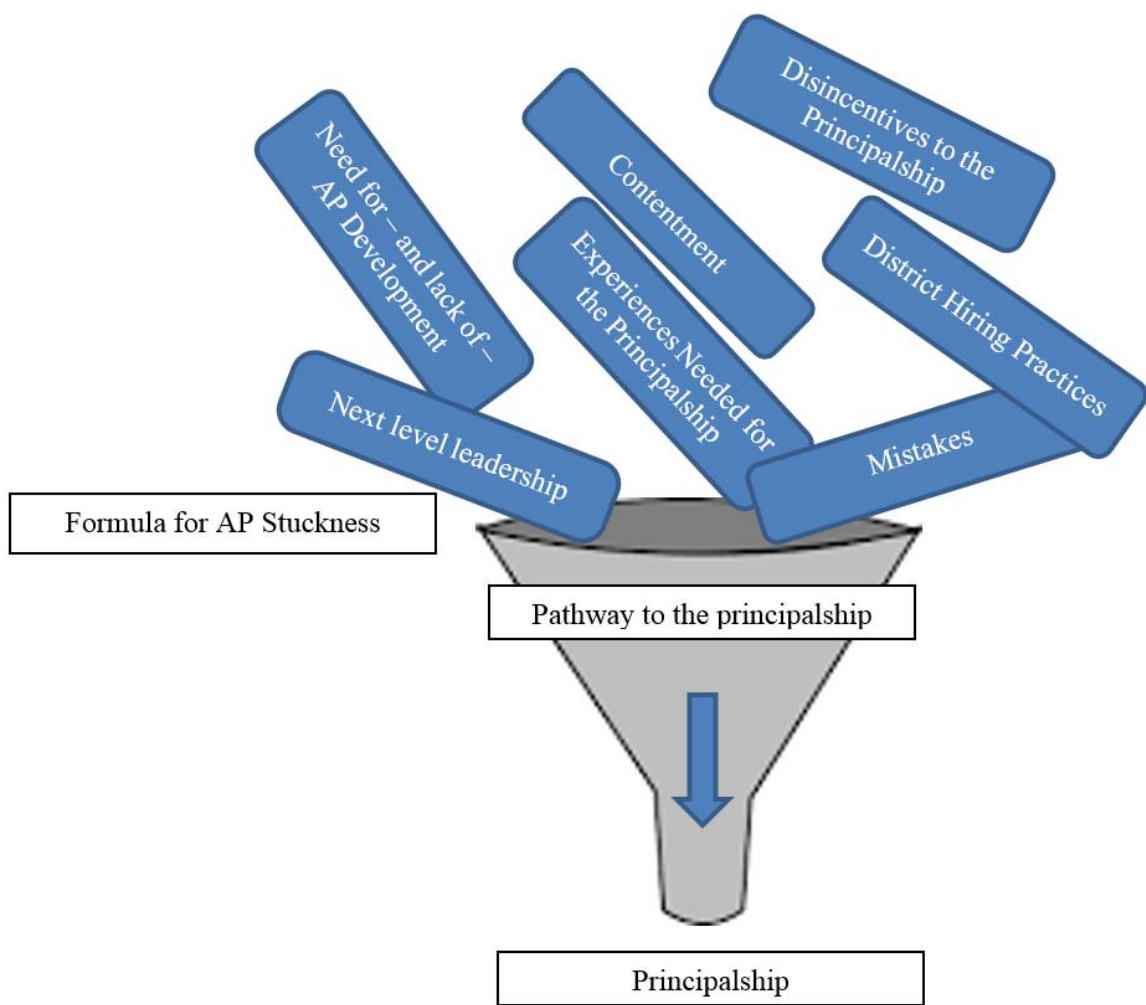


Figure 2. Concept Map Study Findings.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Barriers to the Principalship: Stuck—A Self-imposed Barrier?

This research study focused on the perceived barriers to obtaining the principalship as viewed through the lens of assistant principals and district leaders. Throughout the project, there were several themes that began to emerge that clarified my view of the barriers that limit opportunities for the principalship. The seven major themes from the data are the following: next level leadership; the need for AP development; experiences needed for the principalship; mistakes; district hiring practices; contentment; and disincentives to the principalship. These themes suggest potential barriers to the principalship. In this study I identified and examined potential barriers to the principalship. Although there is a complex array of factors that possibly give rise to barriers, many of these barriers appear to be self-imposed by the individual AP. Whether barriers are self-imposed or not, individual APs must embrace the perspective of efficacy and examine the needed actions that each individual AP should seek to overcome any self-imposed or district imposed barriers. All barriers are not the AP's fault, as the participants in this study discussed many reasons (some more important than others) as to why some APs may find themselves stuck. However, APs must recognize that the impetus for overcoming any barrier (self-imposed or not) is the primary responsibility of the individual AP. Whether an AP needs to seek feedback, consult a mentor, work to

rebuild a relationship, ask forgiveness for a mistake, or take initiative, the barriers can be overcome if the AP recognizes the importance of her/his role in overcoming any barrier.

The role of the AP is complex and varies based on the individual talents and strengths of the AP as well as the specific school and district location. Principal and district expectations can also impact the specific responsibilities and assignments of an AP. One thing is clear: The daily work of the AP does not completely align with the training and course preparation for school administration. Preparation programs and internships are centered on the work of the principal, not the AP. As a result, when an individual is hired as an AP, then they have expectations that their work will be similar to their coursework and training. However, the role of AP is primarily managerial in nature. Reality hits APs, and if promotion to the principalship does not occur quickly, it is easy to begin to feel resentment and frustration based on the job.

The AP participants in this study had various years of experience ranging from three years of experience to 10 years of experience as an AP. All of the APs except AP Barker still want to be a principal; however, they are beginning to question whether that will happen for them. The examples and stories shared by the APs certainly indicated several miss-steps that many of the APs do not fully understand could be the specific reason they have not obtained the principalship. For example, AP Owens rocky relationship with her principal manifested itself in Owens making comments concerning her principal in the company of other teachers. Those comments eventually found their way back to the principal, further damaging the relationship. These examples of mistakes

APs make can create self-imposed barriers that may prevent promotion and result in APs finding themselves stuck as AP.

The idea of being stuck in the AP position was the primary motivation for this study. As a district leader who daily works with administrators and APs, I see many APs who find themselves stuck in the position. Originally, I hypothesized that many APs were stuck because of a critical incident or one major event that occurred that may have impacted how district leaders view the AP. However, I now believe APs are stuck not because of one incident, but a pattern of actions, that are not necessarily major, but do indicate that the AP does not have the trust of the district to lead a school. These patterns can be overcome; however, the AP has to realize their role in changing how they are perceived. This can only be done through daily action. As Superintendent Roarke stated “APs should view everyday as a job interview.”

Stuck: Due to Non-Professional Personal Commitments

AP Richards was almost 30 minutes late for our interview appointment. Mr. Richards called me to inform me he was running behind because he had an issue at one of his rental properties, and he had to go to check on the issue. Richards was working as AP at his school the day we scheduled the interview. I do not think Richards understands that his secondary business is a distraction and obstacle to the principalship. It sends a message to district leadership. I spent one afternoon with Richards, and I could see how it is barrier.

I don't know what else to do. I don't want to go back to the classroom. I love construction. You've never heard this before but one of the things I think is a hold up for me, too, is the number of rental properties I got. Never heard that

before, you never heard that's a, they're extracurricular things that are sort of holding them up. It has never gotten away from me doing my job, it never has, but it is in the back of Elliot Roarke's mind. (Richards, Roanoke County).

The combination of the rental properties with Richards's admitted reluctance to seek out opportunities within curriculum and instruction has stuck him in the assistant principalship for eight plus years. According to Roarke's philosophy, every day is a job interview; Richards should view his rental property business from that perspective.

Stuck: Due to Limited Responsibilities as an AP

The responsibilities of the AP are described as primarily managerial both in the literature and also in the interviews within this project. Hartley (2009) stated that failing to adequately perform the managerial responsibilities and duties of the AP, will likely end an AP's tenure. Oleszewski et al. (2012) stated that often the role of the AP requires performing any responsibilities assigned by the principal; these duties can include student discipline, buses, substitutes, supervision, and teacher observations. Successful APs have to accept the dual role of the position as manager and instructional leader if they want to find success and promotion to the principalship. The participants discussed buses, discipline, testing and supervision as the primary managerial responsibilities found in the AP position. These daily managerial responsibilities can grow tiresome. However, it is a rite of passage. AP Ellis shared that the new AP is always given the buses and ninth grade discipline in the high school. It is a rite or an initiation process that APs must endure. This rite of passage can create resentment, especially if the AP feels that the principal continues to assign more and more without assisting in these managerial areas. AP Owens described a former principal as a "princess" as she refused to help or assist

with any of the managerial aspects of the principalship. These situations created resentment in Owens, and as a result, the relationship with the principal turned sour. AP Richards resents the discipline and the athletics that consumes most of his day. These APs have allowed the daily grind of the job to affect how they feel about the position or their principal. These feelings of frustration are often difficult to hide from others, thus making these APs appear ungrateful or resentful towards others.

Stuck: Due to Relationship with Principal

Districts want the principal and AP relationship to be strong and positive. These types of positive relationships create collaborative climates where the AP is able to learn and develop. However, if the relationship between the principal and AP is not a positive one, then the AP can be left out of important events and opportunities. Damaged relationships often get worse as resentment grows. AP Moore's relationship with a principal was certainly damaged, and it resulted in her being transferred to another school. AP Moore did not agree with a hiring decision, and as a result, she was removed from the process. AP Moore did not hide her displeasure over the hiring decision, and one week later, she found herself being transferred to a high school. This transfer was not solicited, and AP Moore feels like her involvement in this specific hiring decision was the reason she was transferred.

AP Owens also had a strained relationship with a principal. Owens had been at this particular elementary school for a few years when the new principal came on board. The new principal struggled with the transition, and AP Owens had to assume several areas of responsibility. As a result, resentment grew in Owens, and she began to talk to

staff members regarding this resentment. AP Owens now regrets the way she handled that transition, as it certainly damaged the relationship between her and the principal.

These examples illustrate how comments can damage the AP/principal relationship. Once the relationship is damaged, it will be hard for the AP to repair it or make amends. APs must remember that the principal already holds the title, and if the AP wants to gain the title of principal, the AP will typically need the support and recommendation of the principal. District leaders will question whether the AP will create friction between district leaders if there is a track record of friction between the AP and principal. APs must resist the urge to use negative comments or create dissension between the principal, or else they may find themselves stuck.

Stuck: Due to Un-willingness to Seek Opportunities

As noted, the AP position entails many managerial responsibilities. However, despite the many duties and responsibilities of the AP, an AP must find time to seek out other opportunities to make a name for him/her. If district leaders are looking for #nextlevelleadership, then APs must seek out opportunities to demonstrate these next level leadership attributes. Hartley (2009) discussed the important of APs committing to some work outside the office. Working just thirty minutes each evening to return emails and spending one to two hours each weekend on major projects can really help an AP get noticed in the eyes of district leaders. AP Oneil has served as an AP for eight years. He discussed his lack of knowledge of the Common Core. He openly shared that he has not taken the time to invest in reviewing these standards. His un-willingness to invest the time to review and develop his knowledge of the standards is an example of he could

easily be overlooked for principal opportunities because of his lack of knowledge of the Common Core standards.

AP Richards has also been an AP for eight plus years. He shared that some APs in his district are constantly calling the district office and seeking feedback on new curriculum initiatives. Richards stated that he will not do that; he views others who attempt these practices as trying to get ahead. Richards feels like the district should know his strengths and should know that his principal license is for K-12 and that he is qualified to lead any school.

Both Oneil and Richards are seemingly stuck in the position of AP. Their reluctance to embrace other opportunities to get ahead may be a major contributing factor in their stuckness. Both APs would be wise to reconsider their thoughts on embracing new ideas and stretching to learn and participate in professional development activities.

Stuck: Due to “Stay and Wait” Mindset

Several AP participants shared a willingness to wait for a principal position. They discussed their desire to stay in their home district and seemed content to wait for an opportunity for a principalship. This “stay and wait” mindset was prevalent among several participants in the rural districts, as they shared they felt as if it was a matter of time and place before they were named principal. Many also referenced their personal faith. Several APs believed that God had a divine plan for them, and they were willing to wait on God’s timeline in their life. The willingness to wait and be patient can be a virtue; however, in smaller rural districts, there are fewer principal positions. With changes in district leadership, superintendents may not understand this willingness to

wait and may see this as an AP being stuck for some reason. If district leadership has any other potential theory based on past performance that may indicate another concern, then the AP could easily be passed over. Willing to wait for the right opportunity can be beneficial if the AP has confirmation from district leadership that the district does see a place (as principal) for the AP in the near future. However, if those conversations have not been had, then APs would be wise to rethink their willingness to wait and consider seeking other opportunities outside their districts. Districts who fail to acknowledge the talents and abilities of APs may not be fully aware of the desire of an AP to become a principal. If an AP wants to become a principal, they must make their intentions known to district leaders that they want to be a principal, and they are willing to look to other districts for that opportunity if necessary.

Stuck: Due to Unwillingness to Examine Why You Are Stuck

APs who want to be a principal but have not had an opportunity as of yet should ask themselves why. Am I stuck as an AP? There were participants in this study who I would clearly characterize as being stuck in the position. However, very few acknowledged being stuck as an AP. I understand that it can be uncomfortable and troubling to admit that one is stuck; however, a failure to acknowledge the possibility of being stuck could solidify the possibility that one is actually stuck. An AP who has not progressed should ask her/his principal and district leadership for feedback and career advice. An AP must also acknowledge past mistakes, patterns, and their commitment to the role of AP. Even if an AP has made mistakes and poor decisions in the past, if an AP is truly sincere in her/his willingness to improve, grow and accept feedback, most

districts will work to help get the AP back on track. However, this responsibility rests mostly with the AP. APs must understand there are numerous other APs across the state, who are interested in becoming a principal. These other candidates are not tied down to a particular geographic area. These APs have demonstrated instructional leadership and a work ethic in their previous roles. They have demonstrated #nextlevelleadership in their previous roles, and they have quality references that can support these candidates also. APs that are stuck need to acknowledge this and actively seek out avenues to become unstuck, if they ever want to obtain the principalship.

Other factors that could be contributing to an AP being stuck include those other factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. which were discussed by the AP participants and district leaders in chapter four. As noted in the research findings, some APs has been passed over for positions in the past, and as a result some believe that there are other factors at play. Former AP Carter discussed race and gender as a possible factor that prevented her from the principalship. Superintendent Rogers shared the example of an AP who was not hired, due to what was perceived as an alternative gay lifestyle. If APs feel like possible discriminatory practices could be hindering their progression to the principalship, then APs again need to access if a change in location is warranted for their personal promotion opportunities. In any event, APs must be reflective and critical of their own circumstances in deciding if they are or are not stuck.

Implications for Practice: Recommendations for School Districts

Within this study, eight district leaders participated and shared their thoughts and experiences relating to APs. All of the participants expressed their desire to hire

qualified and capable principals. Each participant also acknowledged the complexities associated with the principalship. District officials also stated that in smaller rural districts, the tendency is to hire and promote APs to the principalship. However, most of the work for preparing future leaders is left to principals to train and to the individual AP to seek out opportunities to improve and enhance her/his own skills and knowledge. In order to better prepare future principals, I recommend that districts take a more active role in principal preparation. Recommendations include the need to provide consistent and quality feedback to their APs. Assisting principals with AP evaluations and feedback, assigning formal mentors and coaches, and making APs aware of the qualities and characteristics the district is seeking in principal positions are some key recommendations that would assist APs to be better prepared for the principalship.

Cultivate Next Level Leadership

Superintendent Roarke used the phrase #nextlevelleadership as he discussed what he looks for in a prospective future principal. Most district leadership knows what they want when it comes to a principal, however the question is do the APs know what the district is looking for? Identifying the skills, qualities and characteristics that districts are seeking in principal candidates is important to share with APs so they can hone and refine their own skill set to match the needs of the district. However, APs do not know. The APs in this study stated they did not receive any feedback on their interview or suggestions for improvement either. Some APs also identified that end of year evaluations were conducted hurriedly or not at all in some cases. Districts should commit to identifying what they are seeking and also providing feedback to APs to help APs

grow and develop. APs can't get to the next level if they do not know there are next levels. Districts should identify opportunities for the next level through AP Academies and leadership development programs. These programs should provide not only informational sessions that would better prepare APs for the principalship, such as sessions on budget, exceptional children (EC) law, and board policy, but it should also include opportunities to hear from district leadership about the characteristics and qualities that the district is seeking in potential principal candidates. These sessions would also better prepare APs in understanding the districts' efforts to hire the right fit for principal positions.

Be Transparent about Right Fit

The idea of right fit was discussed throughout the interviews. Districts want the right person for a specific principal position. The right person is determined, in the eyes of the district, by the individual circumstances and needs at particular schools. The districts talked about considering issues such as the demographics of the school and community, politics within the district and strengths of individual principal candidates. When districts were pushed to define the right fit, each district leader indicated that right fit is more of a feeling or perception rather than a specific set of characteristics or qualities. Tooms et al. (2010) discussed the ambiguity of the term fit, describing the term of fit as a given in districts, even though it is a term that is hard to define by those that invoke its usage. Superintendent Roarke described it as merging the art and science of hiring. Districts do review resumes and have minimum standards for principal positions; however, the art of hiring includes certain intangibles that districts struggle to define

publicly. Certainly the AP participants in this study did not know specifically what right fit means and sometimes saw it as a rationalization for a political or arbitrary choice.

As a result of APs not knowing what the right fit means, it opens up speculation and resentment when APs are not provided specifically what the district is looking for in the principal position at a particular school. In addition, if APs feel that they are equally qualified, then it can create thoughts of discriminatory hiring practices, especially if APs are not provided any feedback on why the AP was not selected as principal. Districts need to provide specific information regarding qualities desired for each individual school. Instead, all the districts in this study indicated they used the generic application process associated with the Department of Public Instruction, which provides little specific information regarding the needs of the specific school listed. If districts are hiring based on specific needs of schools, then those specific needs should be identified in the application process or job announcement so APs can assess whether they have the strengths that are sought for this specific job listing.

Provide Formal Mentoring Programs

The districts in this study do not have formal mentoring programs for APs. Superintendent Roarke indicated that he tries to serve as a mentor to principals but also admits that it is difficult to sometimes find the needed time. Superintendent Rogers jokingly indicated that providing the administrator the keys to the building is his district's mentoring program. The lack of formal mentoring programs in school districts is a major factor that contributes to APs finding themselves stuck in the position. One district in the study had recently started a Leadership Academy for APs that involved bringing in

outside university professors and district leaders to provide professional development for APs to assist with their development. This can provide APs with needed new knowledge as well as networking, however, it still does not provide a mentor who can listen and provide feedback to APs. As a result, APs do not have productive avenues to seek advice or vent frustration. APs resort to talking to other APs or teachers in their schools who often do not keep the conversations in confidence. Information is shared and APs find themselves in a hole because now the AP is viewed as being resentful or not a team player. Districts should consider utilizing former retired district principals who could serve as a mentor for administrators. Retired principals can share their experiences and also provide advice. In addition, in the role of mentor, the retired principal can serve as a confidant who can be trusted to listen and support the AP.

Formal mentoring programs should be provided for all administrators (principals and APs), and each should be tailored to the specific needs of each group. The role of principal and AP are similar but also include very different roles; as a result, a one size fits all approach is not effective. Programs should include an assigned formal mentor who is able to listen and give advice as well as maintain confidentiality and coaching for the AP. If the AP does not trust that the mentor will maintain confidentiality, then the AP will be less likely to form a relationship with the mentor and the coaching role will suffer. Oleszewski et al. (2012) discussed the importance of socialization for APs. The socialization process includes the initial encounter of the position, an adjustment period, and finally stabilization. Formal mentors can provide a needed ear to listen and impartial advice that can help an AP avoid a mistake during the socialization process (Oleszewski

et al., 2012). APs are also seeking these opportunities to share and bounce ideas back and forth. Districts should invest in formal mentoring programs for APs to provide much needed guidance and support for administrators.

Provide Feedback to APs

Feedback is critical to growth and improvement. Constructive feedback should consist of specific indicators and examples of areas in need of improvement. Barnett et al. (2012) discussed the importance of providing specific and targeted job embedded professional development that is based on the needs of each AP. However, Barnett et al. also indicated that one of the barriers to effective feedback for APs is the increasing turnover among school administrators. This creates a constant cycle of training and replacing, which may create an additional void in the area of professional development and feedback. This finding supports the importance of the evaluation process for APs.

Often evaluations provide credit for the amount of time spent on the job instead of the effectiveness on the job. Credit is given for quantity of work instead of quality of work. All school administrators work long hours, but effective feedback should include specific information on the quality of work accomplished during those long hours. Principals in most districts (and all districts in this study) evaluate APs. Principals are charged with providing feedback to APs; however, often principals do not provide effective feedback for fear of hurting feelings. A 2015 study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation indicated that district officials expressed concerns over the effectiveness of principal evaluations and feedback given to APs (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2015). District officials commented that “principals should more assertively

communicate negative results to APs” (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 59). District officials were concerned that marginal APs were not getting appropriate feedback and as a result were not improving—keeping ineffective APs in the role and blocking opportunities for potential APs who desired school leadership positions. Continual feedback from principals and districts promote better job performance; an AP participant in the Wallace study stated “the feedback that I get from my supervisor is ongoing, the feedback comes throughout meetings, phone calls, emails . . . he and I have had conversations about areas that I need to grow in as well as areas where I have strengths” (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 61). A principal in the Wallace Foundation study indicated that “recurring, informal interaction with a supervisor provides useful evaluative feedback that is grounded in the needs of the school” (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 61). If APs do not receive constructive feedback, they naturally assume that what they are producing in their daily work is effective. They assume they are effective APs because they have not been told otherwise. Districts should hold principals accountable and responsible for providing fair but constructive feedback regarding specific areas of needed improvement to APs.

Offer Help to Get Unstuck

Districts who have APs who are stuck in the position should embrace opportunities to help APs get unstuck. Districts should take responsibility in finding avenues for APs who actively want to be a principal. These avenues should include mentoring programs, specific feedback on needed areas of improvement and assistance in gaining additional knowledge as well as assistance in repairing any damaged

relationships that APs may have with either their principal or the district. If APs want assistance with getting unstuck, then the district should provide that opportunity.

Recommendations for APs

Stuck to Unstuck

The key to getting unstuck is to first admit that you are stuck. I think that APs have to be honest with themselves and acknowledge that they find themselves stuck and need the district's help in getting unstuck. This acknowledgement informs the district that the AP is willing to accept help and feedback in an attempt to get back on track. The acknowledgement of help also shows a level of humility that may be needed, especially if the AP has found him/herself in a position where s/he may have been involved in a mistake or critical event. A mistake or event can often define a career, and if that is the case, an AP will certainly need assistance from the district to obtain another opportunity. Acknowledging the fact that one is stuck forces an AP to acknowledge that there is something that is prohibiting promotion opportunities, and the AP realizes that in order to overcome, s/he needs the district's help.

Overcome a Mistake

All administrators make mistakes. Some mistakes have bigger consequences than others regardless of the perceived size or level of the mistake. AP mistakes often involve a discipline matter or an event that involves one of the many managerial tasks associated with the position. However, sometimes APs make mistakes because they find themselves in a position where the principal is not on campus and the AP has to make a decision. These types of mistakes are often viewed as more severe because in the eye of district

leadership, these events may be viewed as an example of the type of decision making the AP would embrace when they are a principal.

When a mistake is made, an AP should be up front and acknowledge the mistake and make a plan to move forward. APs would be wise to follow AP Hill's advice:

The way that effective leaders deal with things now is they acknowledge it and they say you're exactly right, this was a problem and here's how we're gonna handle it, you know, whether it's a scandal at a university, whatever it is, that's the way you handle it, you acknowledge it, you make a plan, you assure folks, you know, talk about that the children come first, you make sure that everyone's safe and you move forward and I think that probably handles most of the things that are out there.

How an AP responds to the mistake is probably more important than the mistake itself. If an AP tries to offer excuses or shift the blame to another, then the district is less likely to forgive the mistake. However, if the AP humbly acknowledges the mistake and seeks forgiveness and guidance in overcoming the mistake, then district leadership is much more likely to forgive and move past the mistake. Superintendent Rogers stated that he has rarely found that an administrator can't overcome a mistake if they have the right response and attitude.

Cultivate a Positive Relationship with the Principal

The principal/AP relationship is very important to the success of the AP. Principals who value their AP and share experiences often have APs who find themselves well prepared for the role of principal. Hartley (2009) emphasized that building a positive relationship often takes time to build trust with the principal. Hartley (2009) encouraged APs to be patient and not force actions to quickly, as it can damage trust and

thus the relationship. Positive relationships between principals and APs are a result of collaboration, communication and the commitment to an administrative partnership where egos and titles are secondary to what is best for students. Positive relationships result in APs being exposed and included in events such as personnel matters (including hiring and firing), budgetary decisions, participation in professional development, and other matters that typically are reserved for the principal. However, when there is a fractured or damaged relationship between an AP and the principal, the principal will not provide these opportunities for the AP. The AP must understand that if a relationship is damaged, it is primarily up to the AP to repair the relationship. The principal is already the principal, so the AP must accept their role and embrace the fact that the AP must be the one to make amends and attempt to repair the damaged relationship.

When relationships are damaged, trust also suffers. If the AP is acting unprofessionally or sharing information with school staff, the principal certainly will be reluctant to trust the AP. Trust can only be reestablished if the principal feels that the AP is making an honest and humble attempt to make amends and move forward. However, if the AP attempts to go over the principal's head to the district or continues to second guess or participate in activities that do not promote trust and loyalty, then the relationship could find itself permanently damaged.

Seek Feedback

As mentioned earlier, APs often do not receive effective feedback from their principals. As a result, APs must seek out feedback, especially if they find themselves in a position where they are stuck and not advancing to the principalship. APs should start

with their principal and ask specifically where the principal feels they need to improve. Being open and honest is important. Often constructive feedback is not provided because individuals may not be comfortable with providing (principals) or receiving (APs) the feedback. APs who are stuck, must accept the fact that the feedback they need may be hard to hear and difficult, however if the AP wants to improve their chances for promotions, they need to know how others (principals and district leaders) view their performance.

Seek #nextlevelleadership Opportunities

APs should take advantage of opportunities and seek out avenues to showcase their talents. These opportunities can allow district leaders to notice the talents and abilities of APs as they are searching for that #nextlevelleadership. APs need to find ways to go beyond the managerial aspects of the job and seek instructional leadership opportunities. Oleszewski et al. (2012) emphasized the crucial role of instructional leadership as a primary area that APs need to develop. Often the managerial aspect of the AP position hinders the development of instructional leadership in APs. However, Oleszewski et al. (2012) state that time spent on instructional leadership endeavors can directly impact and increase student achievement and testing results. APs can commit to instructional leadership opportunities in a variety of ways. APs can begin a professional learning community (PLC) around a topic of interest or start a PLC book study. APs can attend professional development (PD) sessions offered at conferences, and also participate in online modules that are a component of the district/state evaluation sites such as the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System PD modules. APs that are not

identified as having next level skills must be willing to seek out additional opportunities if they want to change the perception of district leaders.

**Implications for Leadership Preparation:
Recommendations for Preparation Programs**

Leadership development programs play an important role in the development of APs. However, the focus on leadership development is on the principalship. Individuals in leadership development programs learn theory and application as it relates to the principalship. However, there appears to be a void in the preparation of APs that needs to be addressed. The path to the principalship once did not require a stop as an AP; however most will need to experience the role of AP before obtaining the principalship. Colleges and universities would be wise to focus elements of preparation on the specific role of the AP. This preparation could include strategies that will allow APs to develop the needed skills to adapt to the managerial frustrations of the position. Emphasizing the importance of relationship building and knowing your role as AP could help APs avoid potential pitfalls that could promote situations in which APs become stuck. Internship programs place students with principals instead of APs. As a result, the student becomes well versed in the working of the principal, but they are not as exposed to the full managerial responsibilities of the APs. Having a better understanding of the challenges of the AP position and the importance of avoiding the potential areas that can derail principal aspirations would be beneficial for students in preparation development programs.

Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This research project was born from my personal experiences working with assistant principals. As a district leader, I have observed and worked with individual APs who had made a mistake and that mistake then defined who they were and limited the AP's potential for promotion. However, in this study I did not encounter a participant who could identify a critical mistake that they were involved with as an AP. So my study, which began initially with the idea that APs are not promoted due to a critical mistake, should have looked at patterns of mistakes instead of one critical mistake. Although, the data from the research does indicate mistakes that APs made, the findings suggest that APs who are stuck are involved in patterns of mistakes and poor decision making instead of one major critical mistake. Follow up research should focus more on decision making and the impacts of specific decisions and how these decisions may impact future promotion opportunities for APs.

Lack of Diversity in Study

This research project involved seventeen participants from four school districts. There were nine females and eight males who participated. Of the seventeen participants, only two participants were African American (Barker and Carter from Liberty County). I would have liked a more diverse research participant pool, and I think that with more minority participants, there may have been more examples of rich data involving racial disparities and discrimination, especially when discussing the concept of "fit" in hiring practices. In addition, the participants in this study were all from rural districts. I believe that if I had participants from bigger and more urban districts, then I may have gathered

additional data that may be germane to larger districts only. In this study, school district leaders discussed that career APs are more common in larger districts, where salary supplements may be higher.

Positionality of Researcher—Assistant Superintendent

Another possible limitation of this study was my career role as assistant superintendent. As an assistant superintendent, I benefited from making contact with colleagues in other districts who were open to allowing my study in their district. This was a beneficial outcome, as I struggled to connect with districts early in the recruitment stage of the study. However, once I began the interviews with APs, I think my role of assistant superintendent impacted some of the responses of the participants. I felt that some participants were hesitant to admit to instances of poor decision making, bad decisions, or whether or not they were stuck in the position of AP. I felt as if some participants did not want to admit to an assistant superintendent that they had committed mistakes. This could have been a result of the participants not being sure if information they shared would somehow get back to their supervisors. I spent several minutes with each participant after the interview reviewing confidentiality protocols as many APs were worried that their comments may somehow get back to their district leaders. If I had a chance to revisit this, I would have downplayed my position as assistant superintendent. However, my position did open opportunities for me in four districts due to professional contacts and networking.

Lack of Larger Districts

A final limitation in this study is the lack of larger and more urban districts. The four participating districts were all rural. Participants from larger districts may have had different experiences to pull from and discuss. I know from personal experience interviewing in larger districts that hiring and interview practices are different. There are larger districts that have multi-faceted components of the interview starting with inventories and surveys that applicants must complete. In addition, in larger districts, there are more APs employed. In one smaller district that participated in my study there were only four APs employed in the entire district. In large districts, there are schools that have four APs in one school, so certainly the participant pool would have been larger and possibly more diverse. None of the larger districts in our region responded to my recruitment efforts. In talking informally to some officials who have worked or currently work in these larger districts, I was told that research participation is discouraged due to the fact that districts do not trust what their APs may say. The implication was that the districts did not want to participate in any study that could have some potentially negative impact.

Conclusion

The role of assistant principal continues to be a complex position that can be tedious and difficult. Although the path to the principalship once did not require a stop in the AP position, currently most districts use the AP position as a training ground for the principalship. APs that can effectively juggle the managerial aspects and still find time to develop instructional leadership skills as well as soft skills that promote positive

relationships are what school district leadership is seeking in future principal candidates. Some districts provide assistance along this journey through the use of mentoring programs, professional development opportunities and strong pairings with an effective principal. However, in other districts, the view is that those who want the principalship must promote themselves and find these opportunities on their own. This mindset can be compared to the “cream rising to the top” in the principal pool. In these settings, the AP must work to situate him/herself in a positive light to be noticed. District leaders want APs who can easily step into principal roles and be successful. As a result, much of AP development work is viewed as the responsibility of the individual AP.

When APs run into trouble and find themselves the focus of a mistake or are caught in an environment with a strained relationship with the principal, it is hard to overcome and find opportunities for promotion. APs find themselves stuck. APs must acknowledge that their responses and actions are what will ultimately determine whether or not they can get unstuck. If an AP allows a damaged relationship with their principal to deteriorate or begin to communicate and share comments that undermine the principal or the district, it will be hard to find opportunity for advancement. APs who find themselves stuck must acknowledge their role in their own stuckness and seek opportunities to make amends and seek feedback from their principal and district leaders. Once feedback is received, then the AP must act on the feedback. As Superintendent Rogers indicated, “everyone likes an underdog,” and most districts can forgive if they feel an AP is truly working to improve and grow; however, it is truly the AP’s responsibility to seek these opportunities and take advantage of them if they are provided.

If an AP finds that despite their attempts, they are still stuck, then examining an exit strategy to another district may be the only other option if the AP still wants to become a principal. Barriers are obstacles; however, a barrier does not have to be a permanent obstacle. Figure 3 illustrates the major suggestions and take-aways for APs and districts in preparing APs for the principalship. These suggestions can support both APs' and districts' goal of hiring quality individuals for the principalship.

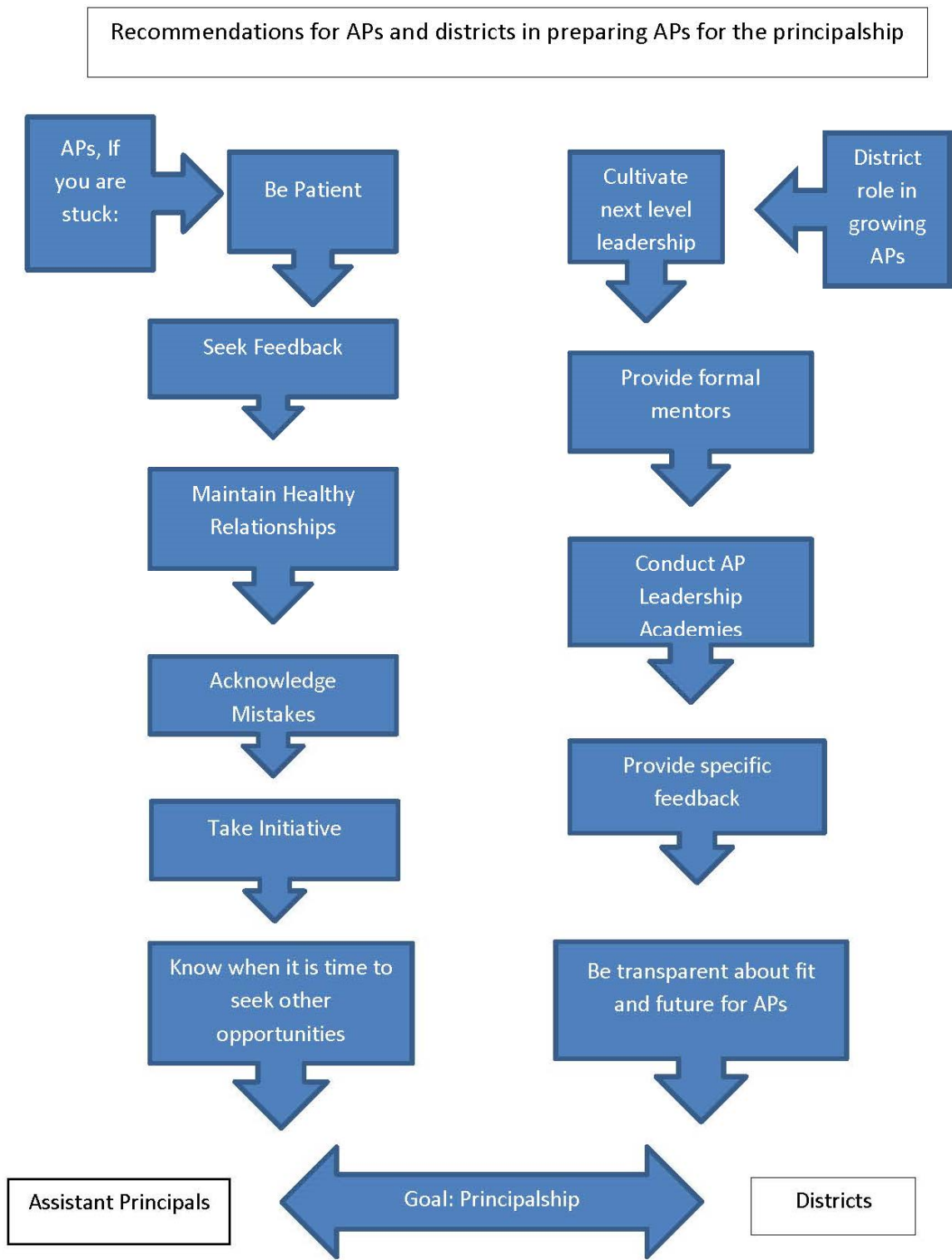


Figure 3. Recommendations for APs and Districts.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: Perceived Barriers Limiting Ascension to the Principalship: Identifying Perceptions of Assistant Principals, Principals and District Supervisors

Project Director: Charles Perkins

Participant's Name: _____

What is the study about?

This is a research project. The research will explore the perceptions of current and/or former assistant principals, principals and district leaders as to why certain assistant principals who aim or had aimed to become K-12 public school principals have been unable to achieve the goal of ascending to the principalship. Educators who choose to pursue K-12 public school administrative positions often envision themselves becoming principals. However, there are some individuals who have been unable to achieve that goal. This study will investigate perceived obstacles to promotion from the assistant principalship to the principalship. Your participation is voluntary.

Why are you asking me?

You are either an assistant principal; or principal; or a district leader involved in the development and evaluation of school based administrators in North Carolina.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

The researcher will request that you participate in an initial, semi-structured interview that will last 60 to 90. The interview will be audio-recorded. If needed, the opportunity will be provided for you to respond to any follow-up questions electronically, in a phone interview or with another face-to-face interview. The need for follow-up questions will be determined by the richness of data collected in the initial interview and questions arising from initial data analysis. A follow-up interview may not be required for every participant, however for most participants a second interview will occur with the same conditions as described above.

Assistant principal interview questions will explore typical duties and responsibilities of assistant principals; opportunities for leadership development; and perceived barriers to the principalship.

Principals and district leaders will participant in a Focus Group interview session lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Focus group questions will examine past experiences working with assistant principals, typical hiring practices; and leadership development for assistant principals. These interviews will also be audio-recorded. A follow up focus group session may be needed based on the information and the richness of data collected. Focus group participants, like all participants are free to end their participation at any time.

Is there any audio/video recording?

The interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape

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cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below in the section: **How will you keep my information confidential?**

What are the dangers to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. Based upon the topic, there may be a slight risk regarding political implications of sharing personal or professional experiences related to your current position. To minimize this risk, the data will remain confidential. If any of the questions make you uncomfortable, you may choose not to respond.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Charles Perkins who may be reached at (336) 552-2097 or cperkins@rock.k12.nc.us or cwperkin@uncg.edu or Kim Hewitt who may be reached at (336) 334-3738 or kkehewitt@uncg.edu.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

The participants in the study may provide insights into deficiencies in preparation programs or additional training opportunities that could increase the potential for promotion to the principalship. In addition, it will serve to fill in gaps in the educational literature and research regarding assistant principal development.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

This study has no direct benefits for you, although benefits gained through reflection and discussion could certainly occur.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

Information will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used and data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. Transcriptions of interviews will be stored electronically and will be password-protected. These will be kept for 1 year after closure of the project. At that time, the data will be shredded and/or deleted. The researcher will be the only one with access to the identifiable data. For peer review, raw data provided will not be identifiable. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Participants who are requested to provide answers in a follow-up interview may choose to use email to respond to follow-up questions. Please be aware that absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any

of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Charles Perkins.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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APPENDIX B

INVITATIONS TO PARTICIPATE

Invitation to Participate

Dear _____ (Assistant Principal)

My name is Charles Perkins, and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. I am conducting research on perceived barriers to the principalship. In addition, my research will examine the common work experiences of assistant principals that might promote ascension to the principalship. The study will examine perceptions from assistant principals as well as principals and other district level supervisors.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of current and/or former assistant principals, principals and district leaders as to why certain assistant principals who aim or had aimed to become K-12 public school principals have been unable to achieve the goal of ascending to the principalship. Educators who choose to pursue K-12 public school administrative positions often envision themselves becoming principals. However, there are some individuals who have been unable to achieve that goal. This study will investigate perceived obstacles to promotion from the assistant principalship to the principalship. If you decide to participate, you will be one of approximately 10 assistant principals in this research study.

If you take part in this study, I will conduct an initial interview that will last 60 to 90 minutes. A second follow up interview may also occur if needed. You can talk as much or as little as you like in response to my questions. If needed, the opportunity will be provided for you to respond to any follow-up questions electronically, in a phone interview or with another face-to-face interview. The need for follow-up questions will be determined by the richness of data collected in the initial interview and questions arising from initial data analysis. A follow-up interview may not be needed for every participant. I will make all arrangements for interviews at your convenience. The individual interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. I have attached a copy of the consent form and interview protocol.

As the researcher, I will follow protocol to provide confidentiality to all participants. I ask that all participants agree to be audio-taped. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed. However, in an effort to protect your privacy, I will secure the audiotapes in a locked file cabinet in my home and all electronic data will be password protected. In addition, names will be changed to pseudonyms in the transcript and when I use any quotation in my reports or presentations and no personally identifiable information will be shared. Pseudonyms will also be used for each school district.

You should report any problems to the Faculty Advisor. Study participation is completely voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study at any time or stopping early will not result in any negative consequences for individuals.

All participants will be asked to sign a "Consent to act as a human participant" form at the time of the first interview. I have attached a copy of it to this email for you to see in advance. Please review these materials carefully and then e-mail me to let me know whether you are interested in learning more and possibly participating. In addition, I will follow up with your office via telephone, in case you have any questions regarding this study. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Charles Perkins
 cperkins@rock.k12.nc.us
 Doctoral Candidate-UNC Greensboro
 Assistant Superintendent – K-12 Curriculum & Instruction
 Rockingham County Schools
 511 Harrington Highway
 Eden, NC 27288
 336-627-2717

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Invitation to Participate – Focus Group

Dear _____ (Principal or District Level Supervisor)

My name is Charles Perkins, and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. I am conducting research on perceived barriers to the principalship. In addition, my research will examine the common work experiences of assistant principals that might promote ascension to the principalship. The study will examine perceptions from assistant principals as well as principals and other district level supervisors.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of current and/or former assistant principals, principals and district leaders as to why certain assistant principals who aim or had aimed to become K-12 public school principals have been unable to achieve the goal of ascending to the principalship. Educators who choose to pursue K-12 public school administrative positions often envision themselves becoming principals. However, there are some individuals who have been unable to achieve that goal. This study will investigate perceived obstacles to promotion from the assistant principalship to the principalship. If you decide to participate, you will be one of approximately 8 principals and/or district level supervisors in this research study serving in a focus group. An additional 10 assistant principals will also participate in the study via individual interviews.

If you take part in this study, you will participate in a focus group interview with other district leaders that will last approximately 90 minutes. A second follow up interview may also occur if needed. You can talk as much or as little as you like in response to my questions. If needed, the opportunity will be provided for you to respond to any follow-up questions electronically, in a phone interview or with another face-to-face interview. The need for follow-up questions will be determined by the richness of data collected in the initial focus group interview and questions arising from initial data analysis. I will make all arrangements for interviews at your convenience after consulting with all focus group participants. The focus group interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. I have attached a copy of the consent form and interview protocol.

As the researcher, I will follow protocol to provide confidentiality to all participants. I ask that all participants agree to be audio-taped. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed. However, in an effort to protect your privacy, I will secure the audiotapes in a locked file cabinet in my home and all electronic data will be password protected. In addition, names will be changed to pseudonyms in the transcript and when I use any quotation in my reports or presentations and no personally identifiable information will be shared. Pseudonyms will also be used for each school district.

You should report any problems to the Faculty Advisor. Study participation is completely voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study at any time or stopping early will not result in any negative consequences for individuals.

All participants will be asked to sign a "Consent to act as a human participant" form at the time of the first interview. I have attached a copy of it to this email for you to see in advance. Please review these materials carefully and then e-mail me to let me know whether you are interested in learning more and possibly participating. In addition, I will follow up with your office via telephone, in case you have any questions regarding this study. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Charles Perkins
 cperkins@rock.k12.nc.us
 Doctoral Candidate-UNC Greensboro
 Assistant Superintendent – K-12 Curriculum & Instruction
 Rockingham County Schools
 511 Harrington Highway
 Eden, NC 27288
 336-627-2717

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APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS

Charles Perkins

Perceived Barriers Limiting Ascension to the Principalship: Identifying Perceptions Of Assistant Principals, Principals And District Supervisors

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of current and/or former assistant principals, principals and district leaders as to why certain assistant principals who aim or had aimed to become K-12 public school principals have been unable to achieve the goal of ascending to the principalship. Educators who choose to pursue K-12 public school administrative positions often envision themselves becoming principals. However, there are some individuals who have been unable to achieve that goal. This study will investigate perceived obstacles to promotion from the assistant principalship to the principalship.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of assistant principals as to why they have not or did not obtain the principalship (specifically reflecting on their past interviews, past experiences and events such as critical mistakes or lapses in judgment and other perceptions)?
2. What shared experiences within the professional scope of assistant principals' daily work contribute to ascension to the principalship?
3. What are the perceptions of principals and district level officials (who have worked with assistant principals) as to why assistant principals have not been promoted to the principalship?

Methodology

The qualitative research study is designed through the framework of phenomenology, in which the shared common experiences and perceptions of assistant principals will provide insight into why certain assistant principals have yet to achieve the principalship. The phenomenon shared by assistant principals is this study is that they are "stuck" in the AP role. Asking APs why they feel they are stuck will drive the focus of this study. However, I will triangulate this data with the experiences of sitting principals and district level supervisors (through the use of a focus group) with APs who are stuck. These participants will also provide insight into why certain APs get stuck in this role and how, potentially, they can get unstuck.

Methods

Data will be collected through individual interviews of assistant principals to help determine what factors assistant principals feel limit their opportunities of becoming a K-12 public school principal. Additional inquiry will investigate the beliefs of current district school leaders and principals regarding the reasons that have limited assistant principals' ascension to the principalship. A focus group will provide critical perspectives from 5 - 7 experienced principals and/or district level supervisors, directors and executive level staff.

Participants

- AP participants: 10 APs from Region 5 with 3 or more years experience as an AP (1 individual interview consisting of 60 - 90 minutes with a planned follow up interview)
Select districts from NC Region 5 (Piedmont Triad Education Consortium member districts)
- Principal/District Focus Group: 5 – 7 current principals/district supervisors (90 minutes focus group interview)
- Interested participants will be contacted via email and in addition receive a follow up telephone call in case participants have any questions.

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Charles Perkins – Telephone Script

Hello, this is Charles Perkins calling to follow up on an email I sent regarding the study titled: Perceived Barriers Limiting Ascension to the Principalship: Identifying Perceptions Of Assistant Principals, Principals And District Supervisors. I wanted to provide you with an opportunity to ask questions or allow me to provide an overview of the study.

[Note: I will respond to questions using the information below.]

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of current and/or former assistant principals, principals and district leaders as to why certain assistant principals who aim or had aimed to become K-12 public school principals have been unable to achieve the goal of ascending to the principalship. Educators who choose to pursue K-12 public school administrative positions often envision themselves becoming principals. However, there are some individuals who have been unable to achieve that goal. This study will investigate perceived obstacles to promotion from the assistant principalship to the principalship.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of assistant principals as to why they have not or did not obtain the principalship (specifically reflecting on their past interviews, past experiences and events such as critical mistakes or lapses in judgment and other perceptions)?
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Methodology

The qualitative research study is designed through the framework of phenomenology, in which the shared common experiences and perceptions of assistant principals will provide insight into why certain assistant principals have yet to achieve the principalship. The phenomenon shared by assistant principals in this study is that they are "stuck" in the AP role. Asking APs why they feel they are stuck will drive the focus of this study. However, I will triangulate this data with the experiences of sitting principals and district level supervisors (through the use of a focus group) with APs who are stuck. These participants will also provide insight into why certain APs get stuck in this role and how, potentially, they can get unstuck.

Methods

Data will be collected through individual interviews of assistant principals to help determine what factors assistant principals feel limit their opportunities of becoming a K-12 public school principal. Additional inquiry will investigate the beliefs of current district school leaders and principals regarding the reasons that have limited assistant principals' ascension to the principalship. A focus group will provide critical perspectives from 5 - 7 experienced principals and/or district level supervisors, directors and executive level staff.

Participants

- AP participants: 10 APs from Region 5 with 3 or more years experience as an AP (1 individual interview consisting of 60 - 90 minutes with a planned follow up interview)
Select districts from NC Region 5 (Piedmont Triad Education Consortium member districts)
- Principal/District Focus Group: 5 – 7 current principals/district supervisors (90 minutes focus group interview)

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Charles Perkins – Telephone Script

Next Steps

Schedule meeting time/interview

Contact information

Charles W. Perkins

336-552-2097

cperkins@rock.k12.nc.us

cwperkin@uncg.edu

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APPENDIX D**MEMBER CHECK FORM AND REQUEST EMAIL**

Project Title: Perceived Barriers Limiting Ascension to the Principalship: Identifying Perceptions of Assistant Principals, Principals and District Supervisors

Project Director: Charles Perkins, cwperkin@uncg.edu, 336.552.2097

Member Checking Overview

- Reviewing and providing feedback of the Results Draft is voluntary for participants
- An electronic version of the draft has been sent via email
- If a hard copy of the Results Draft is preferred, please send a the mailing address you would like it sent to cwperkin@uncg.edu
- Complete the Member Check Form and return to Charles Perkins by Sunday, January 31, 2016 (optional)

Pseudonym

- To receive your pseudonym by email, please send request to cwperkin@uncg.edu and specify the email address you would like it to be sent
- To receive your pseudonym by phone, please call Charles Perkins @ 336.552.2097 or send an email request to cwperkin@uncg.edu with the phone number to contact you

Member Check Form (optional)

- To return the form electronically, please email completed form to cwperkin@uncg.edu by Sunday, January 31, 2016.
- To return via postal mail, please send a request for a self-addressed stamped envelope to cwperkin@uncg.edu with the mailing address you would like it sent.

Date: _____

Please provide feedback on the results presented in the draft. What, if any, data may be misrepresented or not captured that you wish to be considered for revision.

MEMBER CHECK REQUEST EMAIL

Study Participant _____,

Good evening. Thank you for your participation in my research study.

Project Title: Perceived Barriers Limiting Ascension to the Principaship: Identifying Perceptions of Assistant Principals, Principals and District Supervisors

Project Director: Charles Perkins, [my email address], [my phone number]

To improve trustworthiness of the data, I will use Member Checking as a part of the methodology. I am interested in your feedback specific to the Results Draft. I have included the Results Draft as an attachment to this email for your convenience. If you prefer a hard copy, please reply to this email with the address you would like it sent.

If you are willing to participate in the Member Checking process, please review the information below and complete the attached form and return it by Sunday, January 31, 2016. If you are not interested in providing a Member Check, please respond to this email that you will not be providing one.

Pseudonym

- To receive your pseudonym by email, please send an email request and include the email address you would like it sent to [\[cwperkin@uncg.edu\]](mailto:cwperkin@uncg.edu)
- To receive your pseudonym by phone, please call Charles Perkins @ [336.552.2097] or send an email request to [\[cwperkin@uncg.edu\]](mailto:cwperkin@uncg.edu) with the phone number to contact you

Returning the Member Check Form (attached)

- To return the form electronically, please email completed form to [\[cwperkin@uncg.edu\]](mailto:cwperkin@uncg.edu) by Sunday, January 31, 2016.
- To return the form via postal mail, please request a self-addressed stamped envelope by contacting me via email or phone and include the address you wish it to be sent.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have. Thank you again for your invaluable participation. Have a wonderful evening.

Respectfully,

Charles Perkins

APPENDIX E
LEA APPROVAL FORM

[Date]

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter serves as support for Charles Perkins to contact the potential research participant in [Name of LEA] for the study titled **Perceived Barriers Limiting Ascension to the Principalship:**

Identifying Perceptions of Assistant Principals, Principals and District Supervisors.

[Name of LEA] understands that this letter of support in no way obligates the potential research participant in participating in the research. It serves as permission for Charles Perkins to contact the potential participant and proceed with the research protocol as outlined in IRB application number 14-0488.

[LEA Contact]

Signature

APPENDIX F**IRB CERTIFICATE OF TRAINING****Certificate of Training***in***Protecting Human Participants in Research****A Workshop for Student Researchers***presented by:*

Dr. Laurie Wideman Gold, IRB Chair

and

Melissa Beck, ORI Assistant Director

Participant: Charles Perkins*During this workshop, researchers were prepared to:*

- ❖ *understand the necessity for protecting human participants in research,*
- ❖ *understand the procedures and processes of the IRB,*
- ❖ *understand how these procedures can assist with research design and implementation,*
- ❖ *understand how the procedures reflect researchers' interests in ethical research practice, and complete a successful application to the IRB.*

Valid March 19, 2014 through March 18, 2019

Location: EUC Azalea Room