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## Investigation of Mentoring for Instructional Leadership within an Educational Consortium

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Investigation of Mentoring for Instructional Leadership within an Educational

Consortium

by

Scott A Sturgeon

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Jeanne L. Surface, Ed.D., Chair

Omaha, Nebraska

November, 2015

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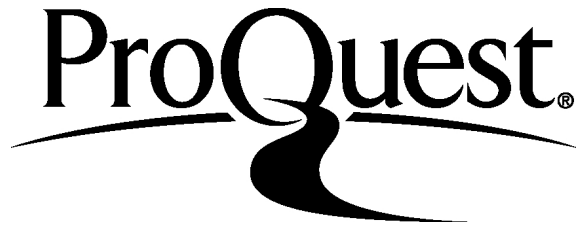
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## Abstract

### Investigation of Mentoring for Instructional Leadership within an Educational Consortium

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University of Nebraska, 2015

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The support of novice principals in their development as instructional leaders is an issue that impacts all school districts. Mentoring is a common method of supporting novices in their development and this study sought to understand the ways in which district members within a midwestern educational consortium were using mentoring to increase instructional leadership skills. First, the study sought to understand how districts supported development of instructional leadership through mentoring. Second, the study looked at if and how districts adjusted supports to meet the modern shift in principal roles from building managers to instructional leaders.

Through a combination of interviews and focus groups with members of the Educational Consortium's Human Resources Task Force and practicing principals from member districts in a doctoral program at the member university, the study was able to build an understanding of current methods of support for novice principals as instructional leaders. It also offered an opportunity to understand the viewpoint of principals with less than ten years of experience, who received either formal or informal support as novices, and to compare those viewpoints to those expressed by the district representatives from the task force.

The results of the study supported existing research that mentoring programs often focus mostly on the survival of a novice principal in their first year and are limited in their direct support for instructional leadership. The study also found that even within formal programs of mentoring novice principals, the overall structure and design was quite limited in the scope, objectives, and feedback systems. The study suggests that opportunities exist for member districts to utilize existing mechanisms in place within the Educational Consortium to create a more comprehensive mentoring program with specific efforts around: instructional leadership, clear outcomes for mentors and mentees, and systems for obtaining and utilizing feedback from mentors and mentees. It also advocates for the investigation of ways the consortium members can support mentoring in smaller districts where staff size does not currently allow formal mentoring to exist.

## Acknowledgments

As I conclude my graduate career in this doctoral program, the number and variety of people to whom I owe thanks is great. This has been a challenging endeavor and one that at different times, called for different types of support. Whether named here or not, if you have been in my life these last three years, I probably owe you a debt of gratitude for your time, your attention, and your patience. Thank you!

No acknowledgement of thanks would be right without thanking my family. My wife, Jen, has made this journey possible for me. Doctoral work is often quite selfish and she has encouraged my work the entire time. Days and nights spent without my assistance with our home and children were not easy, but I was never pulled away from my destination. She truly made this possible and I cannot thank her enough. To my boys, Ryan and Patrick, who were too young when I began to understand that Dad was at class or was gone doing homework. They provided motivation to make the time worth it and for entertainment when I had spent too much time on the tasks of graduate school.

To my father, David, to whom much time was spent in conversation, editing and proofing of this dissertation. It would not have been something worthy of reading without his assistance. Not only that, but his and my entire family's unwavering belief in my abilities as a student and a professional are a sustenance that cannot be repaid. That type of support creates both the energy for success and the fear of failure that are necessary in such a laborious task. I am forever grateful for his and all of my family's support.

To my professional colleagues who have, like my family, supported me through a belief in the work I was doing and the benefit they thought it could offer me. I look

forward to being able to say yes more often for our gatherings outside of the work hours when classes and writing are no longer the priority in my timeframe.

Finally, to my professors who have supported my educational growth along the way with encouragement, ideas, and the occasional foot in the backside. The faculty at the University of Nebraska at Omaha has been a tremendous resource for me throughout the process and I am smarter for working with them. Drs. Keiser, Smith, Christie, Hayes, and most especially, my chair, Dr. Jeanne Surface have all worked very hard to help me learn and succeed through this process. Their support of this study was invaluable and I would not be here without them.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

The country is at once both united and divided in the quest to improve public education. There exist advocates of radical reform, national standards, local standards, vouchers, charters, and more in search of the perfect formula to improve student success in our schools. And while the stated aim maybe the same, student success, their methods vary widely and affect different parts of the educational puzzle. On the front line of any change lay the schools themselves, with principals leading the way. No matter which direction the reform or change agenda moves; a school principal is there to support the goals of their district, to support their teachers in their development, and to solidify a culture of student success within their brick and mortar walls. The principal may be the most important person in the school improvement process. They represent the district, the school, the state and federal governments, teacher and the students all at once. Principals filter initiatives, act as instructional leaders, and provide professional development. And at one point, all of them are novices in their profession and require support to become successful. "...when professional development includes a mentorship, novice principals gain a higher degree of effectiveness that endures throughout their professional development" (Malone, 2002).

The school principal is the central figure in creating an environment of student success. While Katie Haycock's research (1998) tells us that teachers have the single greatest impact on student achievement, the principal is the one responsible for placing that teacher in the right classroom, the right grade level, the right subject, and the right fit. It is the principal who is charged with developing that teacher into one that research

shows makes more than a year's worth of gains in a single academic year. It is the principal who selects, supports, trains, and evaluates the teachers in the classroom and districts are focusing intently on the work of building principal leadership skills. The research puts the effect of principals on student achievement at least 20% (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Miller 2003, Wallace Foundation 2012).

Principals are expected to be the instructional leaders in every school, but they are still asked to take on much more than supporting instruction. "Principals are now more than ever focused on student achievement while still retaining their traditional administrative and building manager duties. Because of this, principals typically work 10 hour days and many believe the job is just not "doable" as it is configured now," (Usdan, McCloud, & Podmostko, 2000). Given the intensity of the role, support for the newest principals is essential. If experienced principals believe the job may not be doable, what does a novice think? If a district wishes to be successful in the long term, it should ensure that new principals are supported. Many districts do this through mentoring programs as a part of the support system.

### **Mentoring within the Local Districts**

A unique aspect of the local educational community is the existence of a Midwestern Educational Consortium made up of twelve districts and two educational service units, which provide support to multiple districts. The consortium works on a variety of projects all designed to support the work of the member districts, sharing information, overseeing professional development for potential superintendents, and sharing research. The work of the consortium is meant to have a direct impact on the communities served by the member districts and service units. "The educational

consortium is aimed at enhancing the quality of education in the metropolitan community (Name suppressed for confidentiality, 2015). They go on to state that their work can, "...support a healthy community, strong economy and high quality of life." The research takes place within the realm of this Educational Consortium and, hopefully, contributes to their work in support of novice principals through mentoring with an improved understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their current processes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Districts need and expect their principals to be instructional leaders. Those districts must find ways to support and promote the growth of their principals, novice principals specifically, as instructional leaders. This study investigated current efforts in mentoring that districts comprising an Educational Consortium are utilizing to support instructional leadership.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore (a) the ways in which the local Educational Consortium member district mentoring programs promote instructional leadership in novice principals, and (b) the view practicing principals have about how mentoring supported their development as instructional leaders.

### **Research Questions**

1. How is instructional leadership supported within the mentoring process of novice principals?
2. How have districts changed their mentoring program to support the shift in expectations for principals as instructional leaders vs. building managers?

## **Definition of Terms**

**Novice Principal** – A novice principal defined as a principal in their first year as the school leader. Such principals are typically considered a novice for only one year and mentoring typically ends after the first year.

**Educational Consortium** – The educational consortium discussed in this study is an organizational partnership comprised of a state university, local school districts in two cities, within two neighboring states, and multiple suburban districts. Also included within the group are two Educational Service Units, funded by the state to provide services and support to districts where providing for unique situations and needs is not fiscally possible. The consortium includes representation from each member and works together on issues affecting each of the members. Task forces are created and meet regularly to address the high priority needs identified by the group in areas such as: staff development, human resources, effective instructional practices, etc. (Name suppressed for confidentiality, 2015)

**Central Office(s)** – Central office(s) are referred to as such due to the structure of typical school districts. Districts are often composed of multiple schools with varied grade bands and a centralized location for district-level leadership and support services to be housed. In smaller districts, district leadership shares space with the school(s), but many district headquarters are separately existing structures from which overarching programs, policy, support, and leadership emanating from one central location.

**Instructional Leadership** – The term, instructional leadership, is one that has been evolving for decades. The current educational research points to the three following characteristics as being those that best describe the role of an instructional leader. They

are as follows: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning environment (Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The depth and breadth of each of those three areas are extensive, but serve as a guide for understanding a larger, complex idea for the role of principal.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study may directly impact local policy and practice within the realm of the local Educational Consortium. The efforts and understanding gained through the work in this study will provide a baseline for member districts to understand how their current practices, and those of their colleagues, provide instructional leadership support for their novice principals. It will also provide human resources staff, and those charged with supporting novice principals, a variety of options to provide that support in a more productive and intentional manner. It will be of significant interest to superintendents and central office staff that work with mentors and mentees in their quest to develop novice principals. By understanding the work in this study, member districts of the Educational Consortium will understand the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the current support system for their novice building leadership.

### **Impact on Policy**

It is the expectation of the researcher that the results of the study will impact the policies in place, or lead to the creation of policies, to support novice principals in a more intentional and efficient manner. Nebraska does not require districts to provide mentors to novice principals as a matter of law, and requirements prescribed from the state level, have created systems to support their principals in a variety of ways. This study could provide the members of the Educational Consortium with a foundation for stronger

mentor programs or to expand on current systems of support available to the member districts.

### **Review of Literature**

The researcher's review of literature focused on three aspects of the environment a novice principal will encounter in their first year. It begins with the transitional environment where principal change is occurring, on the areas where the central office structures and plans support instructional leadership work by principals, and finally, with mentoring itself; including selection of mentors, program design, and support.

Principal transitions occur for a variety of reasons and impact each school community in different ways. What research says is that transitions need to be planned for, intentionally supported, and evaluated (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Miller, 2013). The mentoring process, and more specifically, the novice principal's first year could be impacted greatly by the manner in which the transition is conducted.

Central offices are increasingly looking for ways to support improved instruction in every classroom and every school. A variety of supports are used to ensure that an environment of best practices exists for every child. From organizational design changes that focus support on the principal, through supervision and professional development, to altering the role of the principals, or apprenticeship and induction programs, school districts are focused on utilizing the resources of central offices to improve learning (Jerald, 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2012; Peters, 2008).

Lastly, the use of formal mentoring for novice, or first year, principals exists in an almost infinite variety of ways. From state run programs in Ohio and Louisiana, to district specific in Albuquerque (Malone, 2002; Weingartner, 2009), mentoring programs



look, work, and support principals differently. There are often unspecified goals of improved student achievement or increased principal retention as districts work to meet the needs of their students and their building leadership (Hall, 2008).

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter two focuses on the review of relevant literature regarding principal transitions, central office support for instructional leadership, and the mentoring of novice principals to become instructional leaders. Chapter 3 discusses the design of this study, including the methodologies being used and the process for collecting and analyzing the data. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data collection and the manner in which it was collected. Chapter 5 shares the findings as they relate to the two research questions presented in chapter one. Chapter 6 provides the conclusions and ideas for future research as it relates to the two research questions, with implications for policymakers, district leadership, and the Educational Consortium with which the research was conducted.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

The support a novice principal needs to be successful is as complicated as the job of principal itself. Deciding what a principal must do is both an on-demand responsibility and a long-term prospect. According to Marzano, Waters, & McNulty there are 21 areas where a principal needs to demonstrate proficiency (2005). None of them are simple, none of them are easily developed, but all are important. With that in mind, it becomes critical that school districts are creating systems to provide for the support, growth, and development of their building leadership to meet the needs of the modern-day principal. Mentoring, specifically for novice principals, is one critical piece of the support system, providing guidance and information during the formative time of a principal's development.

With student and school success a topic of conversation in every community, principals of all experience levels have work to do in improving their focus on instructional leadership. "...several recent studies have revealed that principals still spend only 8% to 17% of their time on instructional leadership work as opposed to administrative, managerial, or community relations tasks. One study...concluded that principals devoted only about 3 to 5 hours per week to activities focused on improving instruction during the two-plus years of the study" (Jerald, 2012, p 12). The job is shifting and many of the principals, districts, and schools are not prepared for this shift. Systems in place currently are addressing needs of a bygone era and the newest members of the principalship are being placed into a position where their success and retention is in doubt, because their support will not meet their needs as a whole (Daresh, 1996 & 2007).

The review of literature contained here will focus on the following areas that may impact the needs a novice principal may have as they develop their instructional leadership capacity: the principal transition process, central office support of novice and experienced principals alike as instructional leaders, and the mentoring of novice principals to become instructional leaders. The above areas are what the researcher believes to be the critical components districts need to be cognizant of when investigating ways to support their building level leadership staff in creating a sustainable, mentoring program for novice principals.

### **Principal Transition**

The process of principal transition will affect every school at some point in time, and for the last ten to fifteen years, the transitions have occurred more frequently. Retiring and upwardly mobile principals are leaving the door open to newer and less experienced building leaders to take their place. In fact, a study by Battle (2010) suggests, that 21% of principals nationally will not be in their same job one year to the next. Peters (2008) put the number at 15%. This is all occurring at a time when the focus on school success is in the crosshairs of an unsatisfied public sphere.

Those transitions, where a principal leaves a school and a new one enters, are impactful in a multitude of ways. Relationships throughout the range of school community members are affected. Positions of informal power inside the school are interrupted as the connections, systems, or organization are upended with a change in leadership. The transition can disrupt a school improvement process, where a leader was the central figure in setting the direction a school is moving. It may also be a situation where a charismatic leader must be replaced and where the incoming leader faces an

uphill battle to overcome outsized expectations. The transition could result from the removal or reassignment of an unsuccessful principal in hopes someone new will provide the necessary spark to create positive change. In any and all cases, a change in leadership, or transition, will have an impact on the work, the people, and the culture of a school community.

Principal transitions will have effects, both measureable and not, that should be considered. The resultant effect's bias toward negative or positive results for multiple areas including: student success, building culture, community, parent engagement, and leadership success overall, has been largely left up to the leader coming into the building. It is often done in a manner that may passively ignore the needs of the school, the incoming and outgoing leaders, and inevitably may cost districts in terms of achievement, community and staff support, and hinder long-term sustained improvement.

Whether or not they are aware of it, principals stand on the shoulders of those who went before them and lay the foundation for those who will follow. Sustainable, significant improvement depends on understanding and managing this process over time (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004).

At minimum, the district and the mentor must have a solid understanding of the transition process and effects that a novice must deal with in their first year and beyond. The novice would also benefit from being educated about the process as part of mentoring.

Michael Fullan (2001) discusses the "double edge sword" inherent in any change. The principal transition process is a disruptive change. In ways that are both predictable and unintended, the school community will feel the effects that follow a change in

leadership. School systems must plan for, and understand, the change process that occurs with a principal transition. All schools will face transition in building leadership; both the district and the leader can determine the manner in which it affects a school themselves. The effort made to plan, support, and appropriately manage those transitions, differs greatly from one district to another. The research speaks to the importance and need to consider the transition's effects when making choices that will trigger a transition, and even before one is expected.

Planned continuity occurs when the assignment of a new principal reflects a well-planned succession plan meant to sustain and build on the goals of a predecessor. Sustained school improvement over long periods and across multiple leaders require carefully planned continuity (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004).

### **Principal Transition within School Improvement Planning**

Each school engages in the process of school improvement planning, with connections to district and state level agencies adding expectations to what must be included. What is included in those plans, whether mandated or otherwise, may need to be expanded to consider a change in leadership. The research recommends the inclusion of transition planning in school improvement processes. Fink and Brayman (2006) argue for the inclusion of transition as part of the school improvement process and that inclusion should be mandated from the district offices. And while districts set expectations for what is included in the school improvement plans present in the schools within their realm, the onus is put on the schools themselves to control the plan. School goals could be built with the capacity of the school's distributed leadership to ensure that

principal turnover would not delay improvement plans and ownership of the plan would reside within the entire community, not with a single person.

Such planning would take a significant effort on the part of the existing building leadership, the school community, and require support from the district level. While intensive, it would appear that such participation in a school's planning for improvement would be a boon in and of itself. A novice principal and their mentor could reap great benefits from the existence of such a plan in setting individual goals, assessment of what needs to be occurring in a scope and sequence. It may be neglectful for a district or a school to ignore sustainability in their planning for long-term success of schools.

### **Academic Impact of Transition**

Principal turnover, or transition, may have an effect on student achievement. Researcher Ashley Miller (2013) looked at schools at three different moments in a transition process: before a transition has begun, during a transition, and after the transition has ended. Her findings suggest that scores may rise with the arrival of a new leader, but that rise follows what was typically a decrease in scores prior to the transition beginning. There are changes in scores for students who are affected by transition and turnover, but at this point, it appears too hard to say with certainty that turnover itself is a model to count on for academic improvement. The lack of definitive support would call into question the reliance on the removal of a principal as part of the school improvement process option in states where No Child Left Behind guidelines are still in effect (states without waivers) or situations where it cannot be determined that the principal is the responsible party with regard to a lack of school success.

As stated above, impact most assuredly occurs outside of the academic realm, and within the overall trajectory of a school. Change could be positive for a school in need of improvement, but districts and principals would be wise to understand the academic impact a change may have on student achievement. Subsequently, creating supports related to transitions to address the current direction of student success rates and how to sustain or improve student outcomes. Once again, an intentional effort towards and an understanding of, the existing core of the school needs to be part of the process of building transitions.

### **Central Office Support for Instructional Leadership**

All building leadership staff need support, both systemic and individualized, to increase their capacity. As the expectations for what a principal is expected to focus on continues to push further into instructional leadership, i.e. leader of learners, and the role expands, the more support is needed. The needs of a novice principal are even greater. Novice principals are faced with many more tasks with which they have less knowledge than their more experienced counterparts and may still carry with them their skill set that fits a past, more narrowly focused role. Novices, and the supports currently in place, are in need of one level of support and the design is aimed at another. “The problem that now exists, however, is that principals of today face many new challenges that their predecessors did not necessarily face in the past” (Daresh, 2007, p. 22). Daresh goes on to make the argument that mentoring programs created recently are “found to be inadequate” in supporting increased student test scores (2007, p. 22).

Research is also increasingly focused on the ways in which districts can create systems to support principals as instructional leaders. Multiple studies are focused on the

role of the central office and the manner in which roles within the central office are adjusted to provide direct instructional leadership support to building leaders. Central office administrations are realizing that without support, principals will not be able to shift from the traditional managerial role of the principal to one that views its main focus as instructional. Principals often are left with all previous roles and responsibilities, with instructional leadership simply added to the list. A level of comfort and a desire to keep their job inhibits many from reaching further in to the new arena of being a leader of learners (Daresh, 2007; Jerald, 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2012).

### **Supports for Instructional Leadership**

Craig Jerald (2012) recommends three areas of focus for districts to undertake in the support of principals as instructional leaders. The first is to clarify the role, the second is to develop their skills, and the third is to enable them to meet the expectations through responsibilities and demands outside of instructional leadership (p. 1). Districts have an obligation to support each group, the novice and experienced, beginning with a shared vision of what their role as an instructional leader looks like. Having an agreed upon vision of the position allows principals to benchmark themselves and their work against that vision. That common vision can also provide peer learning opportunities, or ones within the mentor-mentee roles, by providing a clear frame of reference for their conversations (Jerald, 2012, p. 4). His research also provides ideas around how districts are supporting the expectation shift needed to lead teachers instructionally.

Reducing administrative burdens by cutting the number of meetings that require principals to leave their school buildings and by eliminating or streamlining paperwork; Helping principals perform tasks more efficiently by providing them



tools and information that facilitate required tasks and by reorienting central office units to provide more personalized support based on principals' individual needs and school context; Enhancing capacity to manage day-to-day operations by adding or training additional administrative staff members; and Providing principals with assistance in scheduling and defending time for instructional leadership practices (Jerald, 2012, p. 4).

And while district support and design are critically important, the effort of district and building leadership needs to be one of collaboration and communication. The intention of central offices should be one of "joint work" and be based on ongoing dialogue between the various parties to ensure support is going where and when it is needed (Boerema, 2011; Hallinger, 2005; Honig, 2012; Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010; Jerald, 2012; Peters, 2008).

Districts, charter management organizations, foundations, and researchers are all looking at the role of the principal and how it can be supported for student learning outcomes. Work done by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Wallace Foundation, and a large number of districts, are looking for ways to create a "doable" job of principal as instructional leader. Many districts are creating new positions specifically to support instructional leadership development. Job descriptions are being rewritten, selection criteria are changing, and mentoring program goals are emerging where survival is no longer the end goal (Daresh, 2007; Jerald, 2012).

### **Principal as Instructional Leader**

The school leader of today requires a level of sophistication, pedagogical understanding and a skill-set that principals of a generation ago rarely needed or used.

The recommendations for what makes a principal an instructional leader are far-reaching and dynamic. Hallinger (2005) said it required the, “defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive learning climate” (p. 225). Others suggest a balance of broad and targeted support for teachers (May & Supovitz, 2011). Balanced leadership models suggest with a focus on curriculum fidelity, goal setting, feedback, community involvement, school climate, and professionalism (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

The school improvement and reform efforts have shifted from a variety of areas regarding the best teachers, building designs, district organization charts, to the principal of the school. To what degree is that person working towards increasing the instructional effectiveness of their staff? Are they effective? Are they dedicating the time to the tasks that create leverage for academic gains? Central offices are tasked with answering those questions and how they, as the support systems, are responsible for the answers to those questions.

### **Mentoring Novice Principals**

Mentoring is a broadly used method for supporting new leaders across a wide variety of the working world. Programs, both formal and informal, exist in an array of structures, all with a belief that those who have come before can pass on their wisdom to those who are only beginning. If being a principal is the educational example of the “undoable job” (Usdan et al., 2000), then mentoring is often the first defense by which districts, educational agencies, universities and states are attempting to support novice principals in understanding how to succeed in the face of such inherent difficulty. Discussions of principal turnover and retention rates often include providing mentoring

as one option where a district can provide a buttress against the myriad of demands inherent in the job. It can also be where a novice learns how to narrow their focus to the priorities they need to be successful in the eyes of the district that employs them.

The focus of this section of the literature review will seek to narrow the scope from the broad idea of mentoring new leaders for instructional leadership, mentor selection processes, and mentorship program designs.

### **Mentoring for Instructional Leadership**

If the modern principal must be the instructional leader of the school, it would stand to reason that the mentoring process would include support specifically around that aspect of the position. As Daresh found in his research (2007), it is not a matter of simply changing the conversation from one focused on schedules and budgets, to one of instructional systems. A novice principal has a learning curve for every aspect of their job, their role as a leader, their own personal fears, expectations, and needs. Mentoring programs must plan for, and mentors must understand this and be ready to guide the novice leader as they progress through their needs all the while the conversations move them into an instructional leader modality.

John Daresh (2007) researched two urban districts whose mentoring programs were explicitly stated to support instructional leadership. In each district, leaders who were believed to be instructionally successful as revealed by their test scores were chosen. They were also selected because of their no-nonsense style of leadership; their ability to navigate the many constituencies included within the school community, and interest in supporting novice principals in their first years (p. 23). As can be imagined it, “was not an easy assignment” (p. 23). Novice principals have a wide variety of needs related to a

myriad of factors. Prior work experience, educational level, personality, belief system and philosophy, and inherent concerns about specific aspects of the job (budget, staffing issues, etc.) all contribute to the unique developmental needs of the person tasked with the new role. Mentors also come with a variety of strengths and weaknesses themselves that can support or exacerbate the needs of the novice. Maybe most importantly in Daresh's research was that even the most dedicated of novice principals must, "be mentored in a way that is sensitive to the developmental realities of becoming school principals" (p. 25). That is to say, that merely focusing on instructional leadership in the mentoring process will not produce the desired focus and results in the mentees if their needs as novice school principals overall are not met.

In the writing of Carl Weingartner (2003) on effective mentoring programs, his position was instructional leadership should be dealt with as part of the time management proficiency a novice and their mentor must work to develop. How, when, and where to focus efforts are part of the process to focus thinking about instructional leadership by the novice principal that must be supported by the mentor rather than coming up with the answers for their mentees (Weingartner, 2003). Again, being an instructional leader is one part of the position, not the only part. It must be dealt with both intentionally and within the scope of the entirety of the job itself.

As the role of the principal adds depth and complexity, the role of the mentor must surely follow suit. Managing a school building is just one aspect of the role of the principal and as such their support must be designed to deal with that change in roles from building manager to instructional leader. The district support for their mentors must be designed to meet the aims of the district, whatever they may be.

## **Mentor Selection**

There may not be a more important decision made in the process of mentoring a novice than the selection of assigned mentor. The role this person will play will be varied and deep. They will be the voice of the district, a therapist, a cheerleader, and a sounding board for their mentee. The mentor must have certain qualities and attitudes regarding their purpose and role. According to Knight, Sheets, & Young (2005),

Practicing principals who become mentors must have a strong desire to learn and be willing to commit time toward that end. They must be capable of deep reflection and open to sharing their inner thoughts and feelings. They must admit their mistakes and teach and model by example. They must be able to identify and avoid the pitfalls of mentoring relationships. They must never think of mentoring as a chore.

In other words, it cannot be simply the resident, extended tenure principal; it needs to be a purposeful choice much like the process in principal transition, it must begin with deliberation and forethought. Daresh (2006) lists what he believes to be six qualities of effective mentors including: respect from their peers, demonstrates qualities of effective leaders, asking the right questions as much as providing the right answers, accept more than one way of working, desire for success for their mentee, and understanding the realities of the job (p. 160). Being a mentor is a complicated, difficult and important function in the role a district plays in the development of its leadership through the mentoring selection process. It is evident that the selection process must be, thoughtful, purposeful and specific.

## **Mentoring Program Design**

Formal program designs for principal mentoring are as varied as can be imagined, with about half of the states requiring a form of mentoring and half not. Beginning at the policy level, the expectations are different. Some, like Ohio's Entry-Year Program for Principals requires that principals be to be mentored for two years before they receive a full licensure, are high stakes. Others, such as Albuquerque's Extra Support for Principals, are designed to not be a burden on the time of either the mentor or the mentee (Weingartner, 2003) and are focused on efficiency for the district and the principals. The mentors themselves are occasionally found outside of the district where their mentee is working due to the size of the district or its location (Daresh 2006; Knight et al., 2005; Weingartner, 2003). The mentoring process will be successful only where each part of the process is addressed. Pete Hall (2008) explains it this way, "From defining key terms, to outlining specific goals, each individual element of a formal mentorship is essential to the success of the program" (p 450). He later states that, while the power for a positive and effective mentorship program are vast; the effect of a non-existent or weak process is equally destructive (p. 452).

While research doesn't offer a magic bullet of mentor program design, the research does repeatedly provide for best practices by which districts, educational agencies, and the like can rely upon to ensure their novice principals are supported through mentoring in the strongest possible ways. The list includes, clearly defined and communicated goals, intentional selection of the mentor for the mentees, and an understanding of the needs of novice principals as adult learners, andragogy.

## Literature Review Summary

The principal transition process is a complex and important event in the ongoing life of school community. To a varying degree, districts and schools have worked to provide some support for successful transitions, but it may not receive the attention and focus it deserves. A principal is an integral part of the success of the school, providing for 10-25% of the success of the students (Wallace Foundation, 2012; Waters et al., 2003). Making the event an orchestrated process wherein the school community is a partner with the district, in addition to the goals, structure, and support from the district being put into place could provide the stability and momentum to improve the outcomes of principal transitions.

Students deserve an effort to bring about thoughtful, intentional processes to create environments supporting sustained success. The district, the principal, and the entire school community must include transition planning in their work.

Central office structure and supports are adjusting their focus to areas that target principal needs. The roles of central office staff are shifting to ensure that the principals are true instructional leaders and professional development, supervision, structure are positioned in a manner that supports instructional leadership first. Inherent in the structure of school districts is the significant influence the district-level leadership can have over schools. Staffing, professional development, policy, mission, vision, and expectation all come from and are supported by the central office staff. Central offices can wield tremendous influence over the work done in schools and the manner in which such work is conducted.

The mentoring of novice principals is neither new, nor simple. As the growth and demands of the principal role have increased, the need for districts, states, and educational agencies to support the novice principals have increased as well. Novice principals have diverse needs and need to be supported in individual and systematic ways. Districts have goals for their building leadership and those expectations should be communicated through the process of mentoring. Just as important may be a mentor who understands when and where, developmentally, a novice is ready for either the individualized or systemic supports.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter will describe the method and manner in which data was collected and analyzed in this study. The description will include the research design, data collection procedures, instrumentation, data analysis, limitations and delimitations, and the summary.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore (a) the ways in which Education Consortium member district mentoring programs promote instructional leadership in novice principals, and (b) the view practicing principals have about how mentoring supported their development as instructional leaders.

Two main questions were addressed in this study:

1. In what ways is instructional leadership supported within the mentoring process of novice principals?
2. How have districts changed their mentoring program to support the shift in expectations for principals as instructional leaders vs. building managers?

### **Research Design**

The study will utilize a combination of interviews and focus groups to answer the research questions.

### **Population and Sampling Procedures**

The focus group, defined as “a limited number of individuals, who through conversation with each other, provide information about a specific topic, issue or subject” (Creswell, 2013). This focus group was comprised of the Education Consortium Human

Resource Task Force. The members represent a majority of districts located in the immediate vicinity of the urban and suburban metropolitan center of a midwestern state. This group was chosen as they represent a variety of district sizes and demographics, in addition to being urban and suburban, with all but one being located in the same state. The districts, while different, are working under similar expectations, statutes, and laws governing education in the state. The demographic shifts affecting one, are largely affecting them all and the larger shift on increasing instructional effectiveness to improve academic achievement affects them all.

The practicing principal pool was selected from the consortium's partner university doctoral program for educational administration and supervision, on a voluntary basis, which are also members of the education consortium member districts. The principals have between three to nine years of experience and experienced mentoring through an informal or formal process.

### **Sampling Procedures**

The sampling procedure used was purposeful sampling. The practicing principal interviews and focus group were found through the partner university's doctoral program in educational administration and supervision. The criteria for the central office focus group required that they are members of the Education Consortium Human Resources Task Force, or represent their school district's mentoring program in the instance of the superintendent interviewed. They were willing to answer questions and discuss their district's mentoring of novice principals. This group was used for the diversity of their district sizes and demographics and their answers provided a range of challenges such variation creates in supporting new principals.

## **Instrumentation**

As the researcher, I am a 38 years old male doctoral student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I have been in education for the past 15 years, serving two as a paraprofessional, six years as a classroom teacher, two as an assistant principal, and five as an elementary principal. My first year as a teacher was within the realm of the CADRE II project at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, giving me my first experience within a formal mentoring experience and one that had a focused aim for the novice teachers, comprehensive arts education. Participating in such a program, seeing both the strengths and weaknesses of the mentoring experience helped create a long-lasting interest in the ways in which novices are supported through mentoring. As a novice principal, I was provided a mentor by the school district in which I was employed. While organized in a different manner than the CADRE project, it was a formal process designed specifically for novice principals. In addition to such organized, formal mentoring, I have benefited from the informal mentoring that I received in my teaching and early administrative career. The needs of modern, local district principals are more diverse and more focused at the same time; instructional leadership and knowledge is essential and each professional development opportunity is one in which supporting those skills may be needed.

In anticipation of my own inherent biases, prior to the work with the focus group and the interviews, I sat down and journaled about my beliefs so that I was fully aware of the line of thinking I am bringing into the encounters. Such efforts provided me with a chance to empty my thinking about the subject and prepare myself for the openness that

is necessary for such questioning and understanding. The questions and answers for all focus group sessions and interviews were transcribed.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of analyzing data was done through a grounded theory approach. A grounded theory consists of categories, concepts, and hypothesis that emerge from the act of collecting and analyzing the data. The constant comparative method of data analyses was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a method of developing grounded theory. As named, the constant comparative method will supply the effort that was used to compare the focus group and interview data.

Tesch (1990) described the coding process that was used to analyze the data I collected. The transcripts were read and re-read from the focus groups and the interviews. As the process unfolded, concepts and ideas from the each of the interviews and the focus groups were evaluated for repetition of thought and themes. As topics emerged, they were recorded and then when all were coded, comparisons along themes were made for consistency, concept relation, and sorted to where they may align with the research questions. The answers to the research questions created categories and themes that were compared to the review of literature for support or non-support within the existing research.

The creation of categories, while being intuitive, leaned heavily on the purpose of my study, my personal experiences, and my understanding of the topic. Efforts were made to understand where my own personal beliefs and understandings lie and to not let them influence the emergent data categories.

## **Quality of Research**

The quality of research was established using the criteria presented below. It is in the interest of the researcher to present the data that will be collected in a manner that is true, forthcoming, and of high quality, in order for it to be of highest and best use for the audiences in which it is being written. The researcher relied on criticality, honesties, and integrity in creating a study that may be trusted to be of high quality.

### **Criticality**

Criticality is the basis by which the researcher is able to analyze and remain aware while engaged in research. The researcher was interested in being, “able to affirm negations, as well as, truth” (Marshall, 1990), in the findings of the study.

### **Honesties**

The honesty of the research to be conducted was demanded through the researcher’s “engagement with deceptions, our own and those in the research” (Stronach et al., 2002). In this study, journaling took place prior to conducting of data collections and analyzing of the data to identify personal biases and those presented by the people from which the data was collected to make it known to the researcher where their biases lie. Such efforts helped to provide a more objective viewpoint from which the researcher worked in finding the themes within the data.

### **Integrity**

“Researcher integrity is a concept that identifies the researcher as a person who will necessarily enable a unique interpretation of a data set” (Johnson 1999; Whitetmore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001) The establishment of a grounded theory was done in a manner

that is primarily dependent on the researcher, but was supported through independent analysis of the findings by an outside party.

### **Limitations**

The study reflected the current practices in principal mentoring taking place in the local, urban, and suburban school districts and no claim could be made that the results of this study will represent a perspective that translates nationally. This study is limited to the members of the local Educational Consortium and interviews with members of a doctoral program who are practicing principals. The intention of the study was to understand the manner in which principals are supported in their role today as principals. As a practicing principal, it is possible that the researcher may also be a limitation. Also, not all members of the Human Resources Task Force for the consortium were willing and/or able to participate due to scheduling conflicts or other issues unrelated to the topic or the researcher.

### **Delimitations**

The following delimitations were selected to avoid perceptions that could be affected by dissimilar school settings.

1. All members of the focus group are part of a local, Midwestern Education Consortium
2. All principals interviewed are members of the university partner's doctoral program
3. All principals interviewed have between 3-9 years of experience as a building principal

**Summary**

Chapter 3 presented the design, population and sampling procedures, data analysis, quality of research, limitations and delimitations, and the summary. Chapter 4 presents the focus group and interview data findings.

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of Focus Group and Interview Data Findings

Chapter 4 presents data collected from focus groups and one-on-one interviews with practicing principals, human resources staff, and a superintendent. Focus group data with human resources personnel, and the related superintendent interview, are presented with the themes that emerged through data collection. The practicing principal focus group and interviews are presented in a similar manner, with emergent themes. All those who participated in the research were employed by districts within the Educational Consortium and practicing principals were doctoral students at the university that partners with the Educational Consortium. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore (a) the ways in which the local Educational Consortium member district mentoring programs promote instructional leadership in novice principals, and (b) the view practicing principals have about how mentoring supported their development as instructional leaders. Research centered on the following two research questions:

1. In what ways is instructional leadership supported within the mentoring process of novice principals?
2. How have districts changed their mentoring program to support the shift in expectations for principals as instructional leaders vs. building managers?

This chapter presents data collected from the two focus groups and the individual interviews. The data will be separated by the position of the individual, either central office staff member or practicing principal.

The study came about because of the researcher's deep interest, and repeated participation, in a variety of educational mentoring programs as a practicing teacher and



building principal. As the movement towards building principals as the instructional leader in the school continues to advance, the researcher wanted to investigate the manner in which it was being addressed with our novice principals by central offices. The researcher also wanted to gather feedback from practicing principals about their past experiences as novice principals being mentored and whether that process supported them in their development as an instructional leader.

### **Description of Sample**

The criteria for the central office focus group and interview are that they are members of the Education Consortium Human Resources Task Force. They were willing to answer questions and discuss their district's mentoring of novice principals. This group was used for the diversity of their district sizes and demographics and the answers provided a range of solutions/ideas that such variation creates in supporting new principals. The practicing principal interviews and focus group were sought through the consortium's member university doctoral program in Educational Leadership.

### **Organization and Categorization of Data**

Prior to any data collection being done, an effort was made by the researcher to describe the feelings about the upcoming data collection and what may be discovered. The intention of this exercise was to identify and eliminate any bias that the researcher may have had so that questions and discussion would be free of their expectations and would honestly reflect the intent of the participant. Focus groups and interviews were started with the same discussion that conversations were to be had, that it should be informal and that participants could speak at any time about the questions and information being sought.

After the completion of each focus group or interview, the session was transcribed in its entirety. Once that process was complete, it was read and reread to begin looking for any repetitious phrases or information surrounding within the answers to the questions. Questions focused on topics and issues found within the literature review, such as, instructional leadership support, transition, mentoring program design, and feedback. Once some general ideas began to emerge, they were coded into themes or categories within the two research questions and will be presented within those two questions in chapter 5. In addition, the two separate groups of subjects, the central office staff and the practicing principals, and their respective answers were compared to see if what was being presented by either group was reflected in the answers of the other. For example, central office staff presented answers detailing that mentors and mentees would experience a wide variety of learning side-by-side. The researcher looked for such information, either yay or nay, in the answers of the practicing principals. Finally, the researcher gathered outside counsel as to the accuracy of the researcher's perceived themes and categories to see if the researcher was representing the data accurately.

### **Central Office Responses**

Three themes emerged from the data collected from the central office focus group and interview participants. These themes, consisting of shared experiences, shared planning/learning, and hiring instructional leaders are presented in the following pages.

*Shared experiences.* A basic tenet of a mentor-mentee relationship is that one will have experiences that can be used as a tool for teaching a mentee about the performance of the duties in their position. Central office staff built their expectations for the

mentoring of novice principals on that basis and described that in a number of ways. It begins with the selection process, where human resource staff discusses choosing a mentor who will, “provide the most valuable information, with the most positive spin on things.” Other participants discussed tying the choice of the mentor, in part, to the demographic make-up of the schools. Multiple participants also discussed how their mentees would accompany their mentor in staff evaluation and appraisal activities so that they would enter their own period of evaluation of staff with guided experiences for how it should be work within their district.

We would schedule an observation so that the mentee would go to the mentoring principals school and sit in on the entire process. Sit in on the post-observation conference and have that, and generally that is done before the novice principal has even started them in their own building. And that was extremely valuable to see that process done from a veteran principal.

Another task force member discussed the basic need to be able to ask any question, without fear, about their (novice) own areas of needs and to work through some of the difficult conversations that come in the work of a principal, with someone who has gone through similar challenges in their professional careers.

*Shared planning or learning.* Mentees were not going to be asked, or maybe even permitted, to go forward with planning and preparation activities without their mentor literally sitting beside them, guiding them. One district administrator stated that they wanted them planning their staff development together, “staff development days are specific to the instructional practice that we want to see implemented in those buildings.” A separate task force member discussed the desire to have their experienced leaders assist

the novice in creating a vision, learning how to listen to staff, and how to facilitate the most important aspects of leading a school.

The shared learning portion comes throughout the year, as all building leaders are presented with information from the central office. The mentors and mentees are hearing the messages at the same time, but the mentor can offer context and perspective for the mentee in the ways in which this fits into what has been asked of them before or what may be asked of them in the future. It's about having, "deep conversations," around the topic, with the mentor assisting the mentee in learning within the context of a bigger picture, of the needs of their school, within the larger idea of the district expectations. One central office administrator put it this way:

...spending time together, have those professional conversations, looking at powerful practices, and then working together centered on a culture of (state testing), looking at data, ranking your kids, what are your strategies you are doing that we can share, and then sitting down outside of the academic day and talking and sharing powerful practices.

It becomes learning in the context of their role as a leader within their school and district. The lessons are shared within their mentoring relationship.

*Hiring Instructional Leaders.* Instructional leadership is an integral part of the principal's role and essential functions. Its importance to the districts within the Educational Consortium came out through the selection of new principals as educators who come into the role with instructional leadership experience and expertise. In the largest district, it was shared that prior to becoming principals, there is an expectation that candidates will build the skills for instructional leadership. "It is important that your

district, and I know that we all do this, that we are training all people in all positions to be instructional leaders and at all times, because that is why we are here.” A midsized district explained it like this, “I think as opposed to being so very focused on building instructional leadership, we select for instructional leadership...” In that same district, effort was made to smooth and limit the effects of principal transition by including building-level staff in the school improvement planning to increase sustainability. Such effort could also assist in offering better balance in principal selection, as certain instructional systems would live independently of the leader. In one of the smaller districts, they are treating novice principal support as more of a coaching model and are moving away from support from the narrower band of school improvement into school design.

What we are going to do next year, we are moving, we are moving away from school improvement to school design. So we want our coaches to help people with; how do you build a shared vision, listen to your teachers, how do you really become the person who doesn't have to be the expert on all the instructional stuff, but can facilitate that question and be that transformative leader, not only growing yourself, but those growing those people around you and creating learning organization and be regenerative type things where we see a lot of growth. Such a process requires a different base skill set and understanding. However, most districts within the consortium are looking for staff that has the skills to be instructional leaders and are using the professional development process within their district to build those skills in pre-principal candidates and roles.

The members of the human resources task force and the superintendent interviewed represented districts that varied in size from as large as 50,000 students and more than 80 schools to just over 6000 students and less than 15 schools. All districts could be described as either urban or suburban surrounding and are located within the same midwestern city.

### **Practicing Principal Responses**

The practicing principals that participated in either the focus group or interviews had two themes emerge as well. These themes were: Informality of the support system and a managerial focus of supports and they are shared below.

*Informality of the support system.* Practicing principals, to a person, presented their experiences as an informal process that had limited explicit goals or expectations. All but one felt and expressed that they were supported, whether a formal mentoring program existed or not. All of them described it as a process that was presented without expectations, timelines, or prescription. One large district principal explained their program like this:

So, it was kind of the expectation that a monthly contact would happen, and then just more of just check-ins, so I could call her for anything and she would reach out on her own, just to see what was happening with me.

And, though more would happen than phone calls or emails, that same principal would say both as a mentee and now, a mentor principal, the main expectation of their district was to be in consistent contact with their assigned mentor/mentee. Another large district principal described the process as beginning with a phone call from human resources with the name of a mentor and then later getting an email from that person. Nothing was

presented to them both simultaneously, nor did the district, where expectations were set, arrange any meeting for them.

Those practicing principals from smaller districts where a formal mentoring process didn't exist, shared experiences that did not differ greatly from their larger district counterparts. Their central office staff or superintendents provided the mentoring and did so through consistent contact, but again, nothing was prescribed or planned in a formal manner. An example would be, "And so the superintendent, his office was in my building, so he came down and supported me that way. He just came to check in."

*Managerial supports.* It is without a doubt that principals have a need to manage their buildings, the people, the physical plant, and the resources. The practicing principals shared that much, if not all, of their support from their formal and informal mentors occurred around the topics that would be described as building management tasks. Areas like budget, evaluation (which can be viewed as both instructional and managerial), staff and community relationships were most often mentioned in their responses. From the largest member of the consortium, the principal described the first meeting, where the mentor came in and presented their list of areas of focus. It included budget, which the novice principal did not feel was an area of need.

When asked about the level of support or discussion around instructional leadership, across the board, the answers were that it was almost non-existent. In the two largest districts, both shared that instruction was either not talked about, "...at all," or only within the context of a larger idea of "systems leadership." Both expressed a desire to have a conversation around the idea of learning. Smaller district principals shared the same experience. One described a situation as being the only one

with elementary-level experience and that discussions around teaching or instruction did not take place with her.

The practicing principals came from five different school districts from within the Educational Consortium that ranged in size from the largest district of over 50,000 students to one of the smallest, with a student population of 1700 students. Three were female and two were male and they ranged in experience from three years as principal to nine years in the position.

### **Observation**

A few points emerged from the conversations around the various focus group sessions and interviews. One, little if any, mentoring work is laid out in writing. Meetings are held, PowerPoints are shared, but the mentees were never given explicit information about outcomes, goals, or chances to provide feedback about the process. One district representative described a document that dealt with the philosophy and ideas for mentoring that should occur with all employees, but not with novice principals specifically. Two, district leadership seemed to perk up when the idea of feedback from mentors and mentees was brought up in conversation. While anecdotal examples were given, from conversations held over lunches and from appraisal meetings, no district representative had a system in place where the mentors and mentees could provide feedback on any part of the process, from selection, to meeting frequency, or to the effectiveness from either participant. The researcher was asked more than once about the existence of such forms and even had a request to share one, should that be found. Mentoring was clearly important to the district representatives and the mentees, but it had not risen to the level where it could be considered a formal program in all areas. Input



structures were in place, meaning the manner in which people were expected to work together (but not put on paper), but outcomes were not part of the discussion. It was help, without an expectation that follow-up would be gathered in a formal manner.

Chapter 4 presented the study purpose, the research questions, and focus group and interview data with members of the human resources task force of the Educational Consortium and practicing principals from the consortium partner university's doctoral program. Chapter 5 presents the findings that emerged within data collected from the two groups in focus groups and interviews.

## Chapter 5

### Data Analysis and Findings

The focus of this chapter will be to share how the two research questions presented at the beginning of this study were answered, how the study's answers compares to existing literature, and the personal observations by the researcher related to the study's findings.

Research centered on the following two research questions:

1. In what ways is instructional leadership supported within the mentoring process of novice principals?
2. How have districts changed their mentoring program to support the shift in expectations for principals as instructional leaders vs. building managers?

Answers to those questions were found through a combination of focus group sessions with members of the Human Resources Task Force, interviews with practicing principals, and a superintendent.

#### **Unstructured Processes Persist**

In all areas of data collection, mentoring of novice principals was typically a skeletal design at most and non-existent at the least, though formative supports were available in districts where no mentoring is offered. Within larger districts where staff and systems exist necessary for a mentoring program, the design is often done very loosely with limited or no stated goals and outcomes shared with mentors and mentees. A large district explained their program design like this:

It is mapped out. Its not something we hand out to the principal, e.g. here is the trip you are going to take with us through your mentoring program. But it is there for us, because we have planned it out; what we are going to do and when.

Another central office representative where mentoring is a formal program answered the question regarding what would someone new be able to learn about the program in writing, they admitted that there was nothing. “And I am going to tell you, I don’t think we have anything that is specifically articulated in our district.”

Within the smaller districts where there may be only a handful of total administrators, the support for a novice principal often comes from their direct supervisor and originates from questions from the mentee or through already existing district meetings designed for purposes other than novice principal support. When those principals were asked about the goals for their first year, their responses spoke to what much of the research on mentoring principals often discussed, survival in the position.

“Survival.”

“Make it to June.”

“Yeah, without hurting anybody.”

Daresh’s (2007) research on shifting support to mentoring novice principals for instructional leadership described the assumption driving most current mentoring programs as, “...the most important goal of any mentoring program must be the assurance that the person being mentored will survive the first year or two on the job.”

While the smaller districts made no claims to the novice principals about support for instructional leadership, the expectation is that they will be successful in that role, as accountability demands it. It creates the need for such supports.

Practicing principals shared the same description as the district representatives, formality in the process was described as being minimal or non-existent and expectations were rarely, if ever, shared with them regarding their first year as a building leader. In a large district, the notification process about their mentoring process was initiated with a phone call and an email, but formality ended there. “I never saw anything on paper. I never went to a meeting where he was introduced or was at. I was told on the phone and then he emailed or called after that.” Another large district principal, who has participated as both the mentee and, now the mentor, described his situation as,

So, it was kind of the expectation was a monthly contact would happen, and then just more of just check-ins, so I could call her for anything and she would reach out on her own, just to see what was happening with me. She shared with me, and I don’t know if she was supposed to, a lot of her systems approach to leadership at her school, and that was kind of how my mind was working, too.

Process structure for many of the districts and their support systems began with mentor selection and ended with the introduction process. The remainder of the program was built around a guiding, side-by-side model where shared planning/learning would be expected to occur, led almost entirely at the discretion of the mentor.

### **Selecting for Instructional Leadership**

Districts are making specific choices for instructional leadership skills and abilities with regard to the selection of a novice principal. The work being done on growing principal candidates and educating staff to be instructional leaders as teaching or support staff is the basis for selection from the candidate pools. A large district in discussing their pool stated it as, “Making sure that our principals, or our people who

want to be principals are in buildings and doing all of those things (instructional leadership), that when they take over it isn't all so new." Another talked about the pool being limited to educators from a limited background of teaching expertise and wondered aloud about the correctness of that for success and balance.

I think, as opposed to being so very focused on building instructional leadership, we select for instructional leadership, to the extent that it is really hard for someone with a P.E. endorsement or a Music endorsement to move into administration, because they are thought, not to have insufficient knowledge of curriculum and instruction, so I worry a little bit about some of the well roundedness, because there is so much focus on instructional leadership. There are managerial kinds of things, your instructional leadership will get you hired, but your managerial technique will get you fired. So there is some real balance of those things.

After the selection process is complete, much of the instructional leadership support is parallel to what an existing principal would receive and is supported through shared experiences. All of the districts that have a formal mentoring program expect the main area of support from mentor to mentee to occur at regularly scheduled district meetings where the message from the district can be filtered and deepened by the mentor. An example is co-planning for professional development and school improvement within like school groups.

We do the array groups that we have at the elementary level, they are typically planning their staff development days together, and staff development days are

specific to the instructional practice that we want to see implemented in those buildings.

Specific efforts to support instructional leadership between mentor and mentee occurred most often through training in the appraisal processes. That is, when a mentor participated in formal observation of their staff, or the staff of the mentee, support for and including instructional leadership, may occur in that particular setting. “We would schedule an observation so that the mentee would go to the mentoring principal’s school and sit in on the entire process.” That type of process, whether it occurred at the mentor or mentee’s building, via videotaped sessions of teachers for calibration of appraisal or some combination, was done at all districts where formal mentoring occurred.

Practicing principals expressed that support for their development as instructional leaders was limited or non-existent. “And he never once talked to me about it...how do I roll this out and become this instructional leader, when really I had been trained to run a building.” Another large district principal answered the question about what areas of instructional leadership support they received or would have liked to experience.

You know to go along with that, if we were to have had a specific, instructional conversation I would have enjoyed, I like it when people sit down. If you were to sit down and tell me what you are looking for in instruction, because what you look for might be different than what I look for and how we define it. Because every time you have that conversation you gain a little bit. I think I might have missed out because we never really had that conversation, I mean that is really getting a lot of areas I probably would have gained a lot from her, but I never really had that opportunity.

Practicing principals within smaller districts had support for managerial tasks without work supporting instruction. “I know that the ones, the central office people they wanted us to talk to, it was if you had a question about budget, here is who you ask.” Support was described as “formative” and meant to be for all aspects of the position, appraisal, building management, budget, etc. It came when it was needed or asked for, but was not delineated in a manner that was focused on the novice principal’s instructional leadership growth. One small district principal was the only administrator with elementary experience in her district and instructional issues would be novel to her support system as well. She stated she reached out to past colleagues in a neighboring district for such instructional needs and questions.

### **Practicing Principals Needs**

The practicing principals consistently expressed that they wanted more and often, different support during their novice year. Principals shared experiences that often included support around the mentors’ strengths and were not reflective of the needs of the mentees. One principal described that the support occurred on a managerial task that they felt very comfortable with and little around new district instructional initiatives.

I remember him emailing me to set up our first visit and at that first visit he kind of said the kinds of things he wanted to help me with. And I remember kind of chuckling in my mind thinking, what if those are not things I wanted help with? Another expressed appreciation for an area of strength that the mentor shared, but that was more by happenstance than intent with areas left wanting for the mentee.

Districts expected mentors to support their mentees at district meetings as a guide for understanding and distilling information. The information was most often directed to

all building leadership and not necessarily that of the novice. Support occurred as a shared learning experience and not as an intentional effort to fill in needs of the mentee. “We meet once a month for breakfast for the first year and topics are not random, but are things we think new principals need and what’s upcoming.”

One district used selection of the mentor as a way to address perceived needs that emerged from the novice principal selection process, but nothing was shared that those needs were communicated to the mentor or the mentee. “And we’ll look a little bit at what would be the areas where we know we are going to have to work and support, depending on what we learned in the interview process and selection process.” A small district practicing principal described an area of need that fit the survival mode of most support systems, but was not addressed, “How do you do your job and how do you take care of yourself and your family? That is exempt in mentoring. I am not even sure we do enough of that today with health and wellness, and jobs.” The topics and support design are most often driven by the district level administration and the mentor strengths.

The researcher observed that the practicing principals were able to reflect and express ways in which they could have seen the process become more helpful for themselves had it been done with more of their feedback, but the majority remained positive about their district and that support was offered in any amount.

### **Unclear Objectives**

Principals involved in formal mentoring programs and informal mentoring experienced a wide-range of supports through their districts. In the consortium used within this study, the processes were varied when formal, and very similar when not. Informal support came in the close confines of small districts, where central



administration and building administration shared a space, a building, or otherwise had proximity as a benefit. Larger districts utilizing formal processes for mentoring varied in their approaches, selection, and administration of their mentoring program and central office support, but not to a great degree. Principals from smaller districts experienced support often based on proximity of school district leadership and were given very loose guidelines for what was and was not appropriate.

I would've liked to have more technical support about this is how the district does things instead a lot of forgiveness along the way. That's what one administrator said to me one time. If you go into the decision with the best of intentions, even if it is not the decision we would have made, we will never, not back you, because we never showed you what we wanted in the first place.

Districts are supporting their novice principals without asking whether their support is doing what they want and expect it to do. None of the districts or the practicing principals was surveyed about their experience. Did the process meet their needs, support the district's goals for novice principals, or did the mentors feel they were effective? None of those questions were asked by the school districts in any formal way. Anecdotal and observational feedback was part of the process and, in some cases, supervisors were also the mentors, so feedback of a certain type was gathered and shared. But, all participants are limited to information on the input side of the process of mentoring without gathering specific data on its perceived effectiveness for the mentors and mentees.

Throughout the literature review for this study, researchers called for clarity in the process, expectations, and outcomes in principal transition, instructional leadership, and

mentoring program designs. The data presented in this study indicates that such clarity does not yet exist for novice principals, their mentors, or the central administrators tasked with transitioning novice principals and leading mentoring programs. Expectations, goals, and feedback remain largely assumed and anecdotal. On two occasions it was mentioned that it would be a good idea to gather formal feedback from both the mentors and the mentees, but in both districts, one of the largest and one of the smallest, nothing currently existed to gather such data and the researcher was asked to share anything good (feedback formats) that was found during their research that could be used in this setting.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the study closely follow the research on current mentoring practices for novice principals. Districts that have formal mentoring programs are leaning heavily on the mentors to direct the learning and topics for their mentees. The focus is often based on the strengths of the mentors and the managerial and legal tasks (appraisal) that are often as much about avoiding failure as they are about improving instructional outcomes. Those smaller districts that lack the internal capacity to support a mentoring program, offer support to their new hires, but do so in a more formative manner. And again, the focus is more on-time and managerial tasks such as budget and purchasing issues.

Feedback about the effectiveness of the support systems, formal or otherwise, is admittedly anecdotal or delivered from mentee to supervisor. No participating district asked for, nor practicing principal participated in, a feedback process about the mentoring experience. Topics chosen for development are either determined by the time of year, based on perceived strengths and weaknesses of the novice, or by the mentor. And while

the majority felt their experiences as a novice were ones where they had positive support, all had ideas about how it could have been more beneficial. Daresh (2007) discussed the need to overcome a novice's personal areas of need (what novices looked at as a barrier to their success) before a focus on district goals could take place. Districts must use an andragogy that fits their novice principals so that they are ready for what the districts need them to become proficient in within their roles. Without feedback before, during, or after the process, districts within the consortium are remaining behind the needs of their novice principals in the design of their mentoring support systems.

In the final chapter, Chapter 6, the study looks at suggestions for future research, ideas to improve the processes currently happening within the Educational Consortium's mentoring programs and support systems, and a final summation of the research.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions, Implications, and Suggestions for Research

“It was here are the keys. They did say, don’t mess that one up (budget).” Too often, our novice principals are literally handed the keys to a school building and given an unstructured send-off to a new position that is more complex and demanding than ever (Usdan et al., 2000). Each district supports their new leaders, some through informal systems of support, others through more formal programs where a specific mentor-mentee relationship is established. Overall, the novice principal’s supports are designed to ensure year one and early career survival above all other goals and responsibility within their principalship.

Principals of all experience levels are faced with a dizzying array of tasks, outcomes, expectations, and responsibilities. Marzano, Waters, & McNulty listed twenty-one areas in which a principal needs to have control of to ensure student achievement (2005). Strong mentoring programs, intentional selection and transition, and learner-centered design could provide districts and their novice principals with an increased chance of success.

### Conclusions

Districts within the Educational Consortium face many challenges when it comes to supporting their novice principals. The needs of each district, each school, and each building are dynamic and providing assistance and support to new leaders in those buildings requires time, effort, money, and training. The varying sizes and demographics of each district vary widely from over 50,000 students to as few as 1,700. Poverty ranges from almost twice the state average to less than half, an almost 60% swing. The

challenges are many, but a solid foundation to build upon exists. That, along with a supportive community base and the existing design of the education consortium creates an opportunity to address the needs of the member districts and their novice leaders in a manner that could allow the burden to be shared amongst them all, with the rewards benefiting to entity overall.

The upcoming section draws conclusions about a) unstructured processes; b) selecting for instructional leadership; c) practicing principal needs; d) unclear outcomes.

### **Unstructured Processes**

The processes that currently exist to support novice principals remain loosely organized overall. Very little information is available in hard copy for a participant to review, a prospect to research, or a central office member to work with when designing professional development and addressing needs. The mentoring that takes place for any principal is a long, complex process that should be based on the needs of the novice principal and their district. Often, the design is based on anecdotal beliefs about past experiences with mentoring programs and focused squarely on the needs of the district, regardless of the needs of the novice principal. Also, much of the mentoring not dictated by the district directly, will be dictated by the beliefs and strengths of the mentor. Lost in all of this are the fundamental needs of the new principal. The internal barriers that exist for them often prevent them from benefiting from support aimed in other areas (Daresh 2007). If the Educational Consortium and their member districts want to improve success of their novice principals, opportunities for improvement in formal designs that could provide for success do exist.

Mentoring program design is not a prescriptive process where only one method could provide support. Member districts in the consortium could benefit from making their existing program more formal, putting it in writing for all parties to see, by providing structure throughout the year, delineating goals for mentors and mentees, and asking for feedback.

### **Selecting for Instructional Leadership**

Districts within the Educational Consortium value instructional leadership for their building leadership. The current educational research points to the three following characteristics as being those that best describe the role of an instructional leader. They are as follows: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning environment (Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The depth and breadth of each of those three areas are extensive, but serve as a guide for understanding a larger, complex idea for the role of principal.

Aspiring leaders have opportunities to participate in a variety of leadership development programs that are district specific and that could add to their learning when obtaining administrative certification. Districts are asking teachers to become instructional leaders, to share their knowledge with principals, and to have a base of knowledge that can benefit a school. Consortium members select their novice principals with instructional leadership as an existing strength, not as something they will specifically enhance through mentoring. Most districts support instructional leadership for all principals, but it is rarely separated for the novice in a manner that would support their understanding of the way to balance instructional leadership within the larger framework of being a school principal. Selecting principals on the basis of their existing

instructional leadership knowledge base limits the candidate pool significantly when turnover in the position is high and also may send a signal that there is only one path to success as principal, instructional leadership knowledge. An important quote from a district representative deserves being shared again here. “There are managerial kinds of things, your instructional leadership will get you hired, but your managerial technique will get you fired.” There is a pitfall in placing significant emphasis on a narrowly tailored area of a very large role, building principal.

### **Practicing Principal Needs**

A novice comes into the role of a principal with a unique background and experiences. The design of their support must take into account that basic fact and provide the flexibility and attention necessary to meet their individual needs, in addition to the needs of the school and the district they serve. None of that can be properly and completely addressed if they are not asked about what they need. In addition, the research on adult learning says that their specific needs are a barrier to learning in other areas until those needs are met. The members of the Educational Consortium have a tremendous opportunity to better meet the needs of their novice principals by beginning their programs with questions geared to better understanding the specific needs of that principal. Such questions would allow the design of their support, the selection and focus of their mentor, to be tailored to fill any gaps in knowledge or understanding and set the novice principal up for earlier success on all areas of the position the district deems important. Again, the existing consortium structure could provide tremendous assistance amongst one another to assist in the design and dissemination of such questions and create a process to improve outcomes for all involved.

## **Unclear Objectives**

If from the outset, the design of support for novice principals is not clearly defined, the outcomes a district wishes to see will be unstructured with results equal to that lack of structure. Backwards design, or Understanding by Design (McTighe & Wiggins, 2005) calls for curriculum to be set up based upon the stated end goal. The rationale goes that if you know where you want to end up, your work that is prepared to get you there will be more focused with less chance of wasted efforts. None of the practicing principals provided an example of what they were expected to accomplish at the end of their mentoring process or first year beyond some form of survival. While within the literature, that is not uncommon, that does not mean that it should be acceptable. The districts have not clearly defined the outcomes for their mentoring or novice principal supports. Mentors, mentees, and the districts would benefit from the laying out of specific goals for the program, the work of the mentors, and the accomplishments of the mentees. Anecdotal observations and opinions are of some value to districts looking to understand the effectiveness of their programs, but it does not provide the data necessary to understand whether worthwhile work is occurring. Opportunities exist for mentors and mentees alike to provide formal feedback on the process that exists in their district, tied to the expected outcomes and the individual needs of the novice. The university member of the consortium could provide significant support for member districts seeking to analyze their mentoring support systems, the needs of their novice principals before and after their mentoring programs, and the mentors view on the process as a whole.



## **Implications for Action**

Novice principals require support for their development and long-term success. The members of the Educational Consortium can increase the chances that the development of their novice principals leads to positive growth and success, providing the districts and community with a well-educated populace. Towards that end, the following areas are where improvement for the collective could be found: a) formalize mentoring; b) gather input and feedback; c) share resources; and d) directly support instructional leadership.

### **Formalize Mentoring**

Districts would likely see immediate benefits from formalizing the process of mentoring novice principals. Formalization of a process provides clarity for all parties and allows for specific feedback to be gathered on the effectiveness of the program in its entirety or within specific areas of a process. Existing programs are largely limited to a loose framework and do not provide mentors or mentees with stated goals and objectives. The process is important as the literature on mentoring programs suggest that a weak mentoring program can actually harm novice principals and impede their growth and success (Daresh, 2007; Hall, 2008; Weingartner, 2009). The Educational Consortium has a strong mentoring program design in place for novice teachers and that design could be adjusted to provide a formal process that could be organized through the consortium or used by individual member districts. Districts that are too small to support mentoring on their own, could seek support through the consortium's design, feedback systems, and possibly through a new system that could provide connections to mentors for novice principals from small districts.

Selection of mentors is of critical importance to the district and the mentee. There is ample information about what type of person should be chosen as a mentor and the qualities which were listed in the literature review from Knight et al. (2005) are listed here:

Practicing principals who become mentors must have a strong desire to learn and be willing to commit time toward that end. They must be capable of deep reflection and open to sharing their inner thoughts and feelings. They must admit their mistakes and teach and model by example. They must be able to identify and avoid the pitfalls of mentoring relationships. They must never think of mentoring as a chore.

For the smaller districts, such a list of expectation may be a tall task, but the consortium membership could offer support there, as referenced later in this chapter. Most importantly, such a list of criteria offers districts with a starting place for how they choose their mentors, how they train them, and the dispositions they need to look for in the selection process. Other factors should and are being taken into account, but often it needs to include skills and attitudes specific to the role of a mentor equal to experience with a particular building or part of the city.

Finally, as Pete Hall (2008) described in his research, mentoring programs that are either non-existent or weak can be as destructive as a positive, strong mentoring programs are beneficial. This is not zero sum work for districts, positive supports create better principals and weak or non-existent supports hurt principals. The effort needs to be made by member districts.

## **Data Gathering**

In an educational age of data driven work, it is hard to find areas where data is limited to non-existent. In mentoring within the consortium, data is limited to anecdotal observations or indirect data that cannot be directly tied to the mentoring provided. From the moment of selection, asking novice principals for information about their areas of perceived need, evaluating the current situation existing in the school, district information gathered from past evaluations and the selection process, and the pool of candidates as mentors, would provide all parties with data that could drive the supports for novice principals.

As the process unfolds, feedback from mentors and mentees could be used as formative data for continuing or changing directions, to provide leadership development programs with information on trends and patterns that emerge, and for future mentor selection and activity choices. At the end of the mentoring program, using the formalized design and defined outcomes as a basis, feedback on the process could be compared to data points utilized for evaluating overall goals and objectives. Principal appraisals could be compared to feedback from the mentor and the mentee for possible connections and patterns. The administrative preparation program within the consortium could benefit from the data collected in making adjustments to classes and information taught. Fiscally, districts could save money by eliminating efforts that are not paying dividends in terms of success and share results with one another in the consortium so that each district is not duplicating the failure of others.

### **Sharing Resources**

The Educational Consortium exists as a way to share resources in a manner that benefits the entire educational community that it works within. Such resource sharing improves outcomes for all students and their districts. In that consortium, a model of formal mentoring for novice teachers exists that has proven successful for over a decade. Beginning with that model, the consortium could develop a program for novice principal mentoring that would allow all districts to benefit from the expertise gained over time. If a common design were adopted, common data collection and feedback systems could be developed to provide specific information for the district and for administrative preparation programs at the university level and at the district level.

Given the diverse needs and demographics of the members, such a collaboration could be quite difficult, but opportunities would still exist to share resources and information. Systems for design, input, feedback, and data collection could be co-developed and utilized by members in a manner that befit their needs. Even on a more limited basis, districts and the university would benefit from the increased amount of information sharing and data collection. The ability to successfully collaborate already exists; this is an opportunity to add to that.

### **Directly Support Instructional Leadership**

Districts within the Educational Consortium are building the capacity of their staff as instructional leaders. They are doing this prior to them becoming building leaders and selecting their building leaders, often based on their instructional leadership acumen. There will be no arguments against building the capacity of instructional leaders as a part of leadership development overall, but a call to specifically address the instructional

component for novices separate from their experienced counterparts is warranted. Novices are learning everything at once, addressing their personal barriers to new knowledge, and they do not have the experience to know where to draw the line. Within the research done with Albuquerque's mentoring program, Weingartner (2009) proposes that instructional leadership should be part of larger discussion of time management. The practicing principals themselves made statements around managing time and effort, as something they wish could have been supported specifically. Time is everyone's challenge in education, making the best use of it is of greater importance if we expect new leaders to run buildings in a manner that differs greatly than that of principals of the past. Instructional leadership has a skill set different than that of teaching students and the connection from professional development for all, to ongoing support of the individual is of significant importance. Such work takes time and understanding. It also requires that novices learn how to manage the many needs that will constantly present themselves in place of such supports. The tyranny of time management is different for a novice who lacks the automaticity of task completion that a veteran does and they need specific support in their progression.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study examined a selection of the district population within the midwestern Educational Consortium member districts and doctoral candidates who are practicing principals at the consortium university. Opportunities exist to research the new frontier of instructional leadership positions within districts, positions that exist to support instructional leadership at the principal level. Many of those positions are new in the last five years and their impact on mentoring and instructional leadership support is largely

unstudied. The largest member district within the Educational Consortium recently added four positions that have the expressed description of directly supporting and supervising principals. Instructional leadership is a main part of their role and expectations; their influence should be measured over time. In addition, given the wide variety of mentoring program designs being utilized across the country, there is little available data on outcomes for such programs. Feedback on mentoring remains a very small aspect of current research and would seem to be an obvious choice to add to the field. Districts studied within the consortium are not collecting data in any formal way on their programs and any work on the design process within the member districts could and should start with feedback from past participants.

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## **Appendix A**

### Human Resources Task Force Focus Group

*How are your mentoring programs designed, and that is just in general?*

Ours is a two-year program, you are paired with a veteran mentor principal. Those principals are carefully selected by HR, they pick principals that will be providing the most valuable information, with the most positive spin on things. Considerable meetings. We meet once a month for breakfast for the first year and topics are not random, but are things we think new principals need and what's upcoming.

Our principals receive a mentor, they are chosen with the help of human resources, and then the executive director for that principal makes the final decision. They are paired according to...we take a lot of things into consideration. We want someone they are going to feel comfortable with and so forth, so they are encouraged to have close contact with their mentor/mentee, however often they need to. Before or after school, we ask that they go and visit the other school, that they visit their school in addition to that mentorship, we ask that they attend almost all of the new principal meetings with that person. The executive directors lead the new principal meetings. They cover different

topics that are pertinent, not just to a new principal, but are also timely to the new principal. In addition to that, every principal has their executive director that meets with them, and that meeting time is as frequently as needed. At minimum once a month, sometimes once a week, sometimes on call, whatever is needed. And that exec director stays with that principal. It is not, what you'd call a 1 year, 2 year, 3 year program, that exec directors stays with you throughout your career.

Our program is not as formal. We have 9 elementaries. We are adding elementary principals often as we are growing. And I would say that our principal's mentors are assigned by the superintendent. However it is a little more natural than having our superintendent select this individual. Most of the principals are coming from the teacher ranks as instructional facilitators. So most of them naturally work with a principal already, closely. And typically, that person would be their mentor.

*So from their building where they had been the instructional facilitator?*

My instructional facilitator became the principal at West Bay Elementary and I am now her mentor. So that's how it works.

*So it is organic, it grows from wherever they came from?*

Our elementary team, our team of 9 principals meets weekly. The mentors and mentee meet with them either right before or after, but are in contact with them daily.

One of the things I wish I would have added to mine for putting things in perspective for those who are outside of our district. They have the new principal meetings, which are at the district level, they have their mentors which are at the school level, and then the executive director who are at all of those levels, but more about day-to-day practical, practice levels. So making sure that we servicing those new principals at all of three levels as a system.

In pply it looks a little different on the elementary side than it does on the secondary side. At the elementary, most of the buildings are a single principal w/o an asst. And so, when those principals come in, they come from within. About 2/3 of principals come from within, about 1/3 come from without. When they come from within, there is a little bit less of a learning curve because they have good understanding of curriculum, practices and procedures, so we are more intentional with those who are coming from without as far as district level involvement. We have our 15 elementary schools divided into three different arrays. The mentor is selected from the array that the new principal will be in, and it is very intentional in being selected by HR. We meet weekly, as an admin team once a month, on the 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of the month. We are talking curriculum, instruction and assessment issues. The second we are talking about general business types of issues, rules, and procedures and that first meeting is divided between secondary and elementary, the second meeting is secondary and elementary together, the third meeting are HR kinds of issues, and student services, and the fourth meeting is data and tech. All admin are at all of those meetings. The new principals are expected to be alongside those mentors, so

that those conversations can occur at a deeper level. In addition to that, we have quarterly meetings that are conducted by HR. We are facilitating things are bubbling to the surface as well as we are going over policy and procedure, as well as student kinds of issues, and staffing kinds of rules and regs. At the secondary level, they are not divided into arrays. They have a team of 5 admin at each of the high schools and a team of 3 admin at each of the junior highs. So the mentor is typically assigned from within the high schools and there may be cross within the two junior highs, because there is a smaller team depending on the circumstances. Again, you have people seated alongside one another for the deeper conversations. The arrays at the elementaries also meet outside of those Wednesday meetings and typically the mentor is on speed dial.

*Some of you kind of answered this about selecting and pairing, some of you talked about growing within, organic growth. Anyone want to add to this about selecting of mentors?*

Just kind of the same thing, we really took a look at demo of schools, where principals could mentor those who have the same challenges, or maybe the same community they faced, same population, same size. We really took a look at two, personalities, who would be a good mentor for that individual that could be a positive connection.

And we'll look a little bit at what would be the areas where we know we are going to have to work and support, depending on what we learned in the interview process and selection process. And try to match those areas where we know there would need to be support.

*I would like to look at instructional leadership. There are a variety of ways in which you can ask someone to support IL growth, with someone who is new to that particular position. Within mentoring itself, what are we asking of our mentors in terms of helping novice principals in terms of instructional leadership?*

Maybe, I'll start with that one. We do the array groups that we have at the elementary level, they are typically planning their staff development days together, and staff development days are specific to the instructional practice that we want to see implemented in those buildings. The arrays are selected because of demographic likeness of schools; oftentimes they are dealing with the same kinds of instructional issues. They are paired that way. At the secondary levels, I would tell you I feel as though we have a ways to go with that and is really the next focus of the district in terms of how do we modify secondary instruction so that we have more engaging classrooms.

One of the probably most resonating things, as mentors, we would schedule an observation so that the mentee would go to the mentoring principals school and sit in on the entire process. Sit in on the post-observation conference and have that, and generally that is done before the novice principal has even started them in their own building. And that was extremely valuable to see that process done from a veteran principal.

That's our very first HR meeting in September, is double scoring and doing video, using video of a teacher doing instruction and doing some calibration with all staff. And we

also pair the new person going out observing in the mentor's building and then they go out and observe in the mentee's building. And we ask them to be strategic about the person they are observing, so that we have a master teacher who this person is observing in one of the two situations and then another teacher who might be struggling a little bit so we have conversations about how do you recognize good instruction and what kind of conversations do we have about that and also, how do you structure that conversation so that teacher will hear when they are struggling.

One thing that our district has done, is worked together with our leadership teams – building level admin, and this year with the EDs, is the building support teams to come out and help with the process of school improvement planning. And when it comes to the mentors working with their mentees, it is sitting down with them and planning professional development days together, doing inter-rater reliability, and coaching together in each other's schools. Or also, the overall workshops, with coaching, spending time together have those professional conversations, looking at powerful practices, and then working together centered on a culture of NESAs, looking at data, ranking your kids, what are your strategies you are doing that we can share, and then sitting down outside of the academic day and talking and sharing powerful practices.

And for us, we have our new principals take 12 essential courses that are is through the district so that everyone is on a common language in terms of professional practices, so it may have to do with school improvement or what do we look for during a formal teacher observation or may have to do with curricular issues. But they are identified and those



courses are taught by individuals from central office or other administrators within the district. During their weekly meetings, I would say is where we have most of that mentoring taking place, which is different from what I am hearing, and perhaps it is because of our size, but at those elementary meeting, there is a Google doc and I will put my agenda items on it, and Dr. Gray from curriculum instruction will put their items on there and we will meet with those principals and go over that and they will plan their professional development together and their school improvement.

And really, the vast majority of real mentoring goes on within our arrays and within those admin meetings on Wednesdays. The other piece that is not intentional, but has fallen out of our process, but there is a ton of mentoring that goes on by our teachers who serve on our continuous improvement teams. Where here is what the data is telling us about what our school is doing, here is the kinds of things we need. That helps us sustain what is happening within a building, rather than having the charisma of a new principal take over whipsaw your building from one side to another.

*And around that idea, transition. How much support, either inside of outside of mentoring, does someone get on how to transition, whether it is understanding what had been going on, background information for that person, connecting them with people in the building or the school community, and then that design of how do you roll in, how to you come into the building?*

One of the things, well when a new principal is given a position, the first thing they do is a transition plan. HR has a transition plan that goes through all of those different things. Community, data, engagement, culture, finances, all of that. And there it is actually different, you complete the transition plan, there are different activities that you do with each of those stakeholder groups and all of that. And then we follow up, the EDs followed up with discussions on transition, not just the different phases of transition for a principal, but for teachers, a school.

And I can attest, as can Melissa and Pam Cohn, we had the opportunity to really mentor and help the buildings we had left, so it made a difference for us to be readily available. As opposed to a few years ago, these positions were not here, and in some sense you did not have that direct support. Nobody knows Sunny Slope better than the individual who was in charge of leading that school community. So those are things that are critical to the new leaders stepping in. As you've said a cell phone punch away to that individual.

Which is actually unique to itself, because it is that person's building, because you have to let your building go and let that person have it.

As soon as we have a new principal named, they are responsible for hiring that goes for that point forward. So that investment of the new person is to the new principal, as opposed to the old one. Often times, depends on the circumstances, on whether it is a positive departure circumstance or not. If it is a healthy, good one, they may together

interview candidates, because the person who has been there knows the team better than the new person.

I have done that very thing.

That is exactly what I did at the building that I left. Prior to having a new principal announced, I, along with the leadership team hired, but after she was announced, I just sat in and turned it over to her because she would be directly responsible of empowering that individual.

If the principal situation, if that departure situation is not a healthy, not as healthy as you might want, we would typically have a central office person who is kind of assigned of walking through those things with that person, rather than that outgoing principal. I think that would be a strain.

*So have you, or have you changed, how you're mentoring program specifically to support more instructional leadership within the district?*

I am going to just piggyback on what these two individuals have been talking about.

With us we noticed the change that we made, we have tried to be more a little bit more purposeful with the transition, due to the growth of the school district and most of the principals are leaving a building to open up a new one. We are trying to id our emerging principal in the spring so that they can be introduced to the PTO, so they can be part of

the hiring process, so they can become active in that school improvement plan already. Those were things that we probably didn't do a few years ago that I have noticed that I have noticed since I moved up into central office and going to school to school within the district.

We use key performance action plans for new principals. We have those for new principals. The first one they do is on transition. And we want to see their individual plan on how they want to transition, and we don't give them this is what we want them to do. And frankly, we are hiring people we know are going to write a good transition plan because they are ready. We wouldn't be hiring them if they weren't ready to be principals. That is a big piece and that is the first mentoring meeting is to sit down and, most of them have them done already, they just haven't put them into our form yet.

And I guess for the instructional leadership portion, you have the four ringed approach, you have your district you have your mentor, you have your BST, sped and general education with ELL with EDs for instructional leadership. We touch all aspects, from the beginning of collecting data, to creation of sip, to implementation of sip, the monitoring of it, having the staff involved, the professional development, the evaluation, the data and so forth, the entire cycle, but also I think it important. You are not just training your new principals to be instructional leaders, well beyond taking that position. It is important that your district, and I know that we all do this, that we are training all people in all positions to be instructional leaders and at all times, because that is why we are here. Then also making sure that we are making sure that is some sort of principal pipeline and

or some type of program in place for people who want to be and can have the opportunity to be involved, we have the LAUNCH here which is a great program, but looking at enhancing our principal pipeline. Making sure that our principals, or our people who want to be principals are in buildings and doing all of those things, that when they take over it isn't all so new.

And an example of that, in years past there was a department, student and community services and a lot of individuals that had an extensive amount of experience in a disciplinary or due process, but not necessarily a strong instructional background, because they weren't there in the daily grind have been assigned to buildings, half day here, a half day there, but full time. But our district has aligned, where they attend instructional leadership meetings, it is the same version of leadership meeting that the principal gets, so you are building their capacity as instructional leaders to build that multi-faceted set of skills that if that is the direction that they want to go, that they can also provide overall instructional goals of the school by being present.

I think as opposed to being so very focused on building instructional leadership, we select for instructional leadership, to the extent that it is really hard for someone with a PE endorsement or a music endorsement to move into administration, because they are thought to have insufficient knowledge of curriculum and instruction, so I worry a little bit about some of the well roundedness, because there is so much focus on instructional leadership. There are managerial kinds of things, your instructional leadership will get

you hired, but your managerial technique will get you fired. So there is some real balance of those things.

*Last follow up, if I were investigating being principal in any of the districts and I wanted to know what mentoring would look like, with goals and expectations for the support I would receive, so I would know exactly what to expect from the program and what the goals of that program were for me?*

Yes, I would tell you it comes from the eyes of the mentors and the people who are planning. It is mapped out. Its not something we hand out to the principal, here is the trip you are going to take with us through your mentoring program. But it is there for us, because we have planned it out; what we are going to do and when.

*I know there are some on-demand, on-time things, when things start to bubble up, but the overarching goal, what are we going to work through?*

And I am going to tell you, I don't think we have anything that is specifically articulated in our district.

One thing I wanted to mention too, that I didn't hear. We also have a new principal institute, for principals, coming into this role, we kind of kept it the way that it was, but now that we have had the opportunity to work with new principals and we have been there, there are some things we are going to change and we are planning that out for next

year, was it a week or three days with us, and they got to become familiar with the different department, but will not be a global perspective, but how does this department support what you have in front of you.

We have a mentor-mentee framework; it is broad-based so it's for, every employee group in the district, and that is the basis for which we work from.

*One more follow up, how do you evaluate or judge how you have done on mentoring, does the mentor or mentee provide any feedback, do they feel like they were supportive of their mentee, do they feel like they got the support they needed, do you get some feedback on how it went? Other than maybe test scores and climate.*

Formally, you are assessing, you are doing formative assessment along the way. Always, the person who is supervising the mentor is supervising the mentee, so there is a conversation that occurs at least quarterly with the mentor and with the mentee, by the supervisor and I am always the person who supervises new principals, so that always comes through HR.

The question was?

*How do you know if it working from the perspective of the mentors and the mentees?*

Well I would say, some of the fun things that have occurred. We have the mentor breakfasts, because of that; we have had three lunches on non-student days where they have been organized by one of the mentees because they just want to get together with that cohort of people that started when they started. The relationship between new principals that were hired and their mentors, sticks around. Its fun to see. There are these little cohorts of people every year who come into the district. I still remember the people I came in with, they are still closer to me than a lot of the other people in the district. It's about the time we spent together, going through it at the same time. It is more anecdotal answer, but certainly and strong one and it does resonate with people.



## **Appendix B**

HR Focus Group Addition:

*How is your district mentoring program designed to support novice principals?*

Well, we really didn't have any official mentoring program when I got here. Then my first year, we changed our voluntary early retirement policy. So we, after my first year, because certain policies were going to change we probably lost, I would say every principal was under three years or less. High school principal, has been here a long time, but probably in year three or four, Russ Olsen, middle school principal, year two, replaced Westgate new principal, paddock new principal, within a year, Rockbrook, new principal, Westbrook, hillside after year one, experienced but new to the district, Swanson we had retirement, new principal, Loveland, we shifted and then we hired, and then Oakdale we replaced. So, what I had was two really good things going for me. One, I had all these principals just retired, because of the policy change, couldn't not retire. So I was able to reach out and hire three of them come back and be principal coaches. So, we designed that to be very much about what does that principal need. It was not to be evaluative at all. It was ok, ask me the dumb questions. Don't have to go to your

supervisor. That is how it began to grow. We looked at coaching as being very different to mentoring. You've probably seen the new teacher project, they have moved into the principalship that was my familiarity in my previous district with the new teacher project. And my experience as a principal for 14 years, no one ever did a professional development with me. None. Very rarely, only nuts and bolts. We got help on how to write a goal; how to do an evaluation, but we didn't get help to how do I promote my instructional leadership. We started there and then the feedback was that the principals really liked it and they really liked having someone with experience that they could go and talk to. What we are going to do next year, we are moving, we are moving away from school improvement to school design. So we want our coaches to help people with how do you build a shared vision, listen to your teachers, how do you really become the person who doesn't have to be the expert on all the instructional stuff, but can facilitate that question and be that transformative leader, not only growing yourself, but those growing those people around you and creating learning org and be regenerative type things where we see a lot of growth. So we are going to shift that, but we are still going to be come to me, but, we also want them to help, build a vision, how do we understand the context, the data, my current reality, seeing the possibilities, designing the future, and designing a school profile which will contain our outcomes. I have got to sit down with their coaches and put down and what we are trying to create is a wiki of information, here is about a shared vision, open source where anyone can add to it, we are going to take one Wednesday a month, strictly about leadership, could be around our evaluation, because we are shifting the evaluation document like the rest of the state, how do we help people feel conformable with that foundational piece or other aspects foundational piece that

guaranteed viable curriculum, or core strategy of literacy and personalized learning, so how do we help people lead people who are doing these types of activities. We are going to take one Wednesday, going to be completely different than the nuts and bolts, we are going to keep that on Thursday pm, and decrease the number of those. And we are going to substitute these. And we will not be in this building. Someplace, else, so that no one is thinking about going back and making an announcement. No announcement. It is strictly about a conversation, an article, something we are implementing, something they are bringing to us.

*So what is your process for selecting and pairing your mentors?*

So, I told you how I selected our coaches. They were recently retired. I kind of let them think about where they needed to be. Some of them had been in those building and so we kind of made sure they weren't in those.

*So it was intentional that they were not connected to their past place?*

Correct. That's right.

*That's different than what some of the other districts do.*

Well, coaching is different than mentoring. If you just left the place that you had been leading. I'm in my fifth district and left jobs and I am sure I didn't get some things done

I wanted to get done. People say, what the heck was he doing. Hard when you are right there trying to coach someone. So that was intentional and then I think looking around what I felt, knowing the people, what would be a good fit, from a personality point of view. Comfort level, that idea of having safety, being able to share things.

*How much have they supported instructional leadership, and what is your goal for them?*

I think they have in the sense of answering questions, how to do some of that. I think going forward, what I do, I make sure the coaches get my internal memo that I tried send out weekly, but I am not always great at that. Its just a communication tool, we invite them to our meetings, to our design meetings for what people are working on, we want them to understand the evaluation process, any new implementation of curriculum, just because if they get a question. I really want them to work, not so much on the instructional coaching, but its more on the, if I were to look into the future, be on that leadership coaching. How do I help young people learn how to have those positive, yet direct conversations? It really boils down to fidelity. I don't like to be prescriptive. I don't like being told what to do. How do I create the flexibility so people know where the boundaries are? It's really about those coaches, our principals work with a group of people to facilitate that buy in, when you have to go talk to somebody. A lot of people really appreciate; people sometime don't know they are not doing those things. We are afraid of some of the those conversations, but in the long run, people respect you a lot more when you do that. It is less about that language art, because we have some people who are in principal positions who know a lot more about curriculum than I do. Because

they taught here, they helped develop it; they helped determine the next iteration. But it is about; you can be a great teacher but not a great principal. So, how do I help, one we want them focused on instruction, but remember that you don't have to know everything? I can't possibly know everything; I cannot run this district by myself. My expertise is around leadership. My masters in administration and supervision, my PhD in educational policy and leadership. I don't have the curriculum masters. I was a pretty good instructional leader as a principal, was really into teaching and learning. More so I was into professional development. So, if I was going to coach, it was about professional developments, around that leadership piece. A lot of people want to be a leader, but not a principal. A different kind of job.

*How have you adjusted your program to support instructional leadership?*

That's all again tying back into our strategic plan; everything we do is focused student achievement and engagement.

*That protects you from a lot of distractions.*

*Do you have, or will you have an evaluation of your program from either side, from the new leader or the coach?*

I meet with the coaches. They meet once a month and I try to get to as many of those as I can. So I get feedback from them on the program. I think something official would be

really nice. I have not done that, but I think your question is really valid. I am going to put it on my to-do list. With their help, develop an instrument. That would give them feedback, too. Anecdotally, we hear nothing but good things. Do you have an instrument at all?

*Most do not have anything down on paper, John Daresh, who I have leaned on, who I think is from UTEP, has an article that focuses on mentoring for instructional leadership. Even those that have something on paper don't share it with the mentees.*

What we are working on, those Wednesdays were called learning labs. I was an assistant principal at age 29. I got to be honest; I don't think we got any PD. I went got back and got my doctorate and created my own professional development. I tease everybody that the book I want everyone to read is twenty years old. So, that's why. I was in charge in one district of k-8 instruction. I had all the schools and the principals. I worked with them all and that's where I began to see this hole in principal professional development. I call it more about leadership. I had a rep as a good instructional leader. Gave great evaluations, because I looked at them as...

*Its not gotcha, its about getting you better*

It's about getting better. Trying to get people good feedback. So with these learning labs. And what we are going to do, we are just going to lay out the dates. I told the elementary principals yesterday, there are two areas where I am going to focus on and the rest I am

going to hear from you. So, I am going to focus on communication. You talked about managerial skills. What gets people in trouble, as good as I think I communicate, you didn't get the memo and you think I am a jerk. It wasn't anything intentional.

Leadership has to be consistent. If I have a spat with my wife in the morning, nobody really wants to hear about it. I got to go in and do what I need to do. The other thing we are going to focus on is this leadership piece. We want everyone to be a systems leader. See the interconnections. I don't know that we all want to, but in the world of Blane, and I get to make some of the decisions, is I want them to be a systems leader, see the interconnections. Seeing how their work in their elementary, impact someone in another elem. We want them to see the whole. See the interdependencies. See how they could help each other. What we are hearing from them is they want opportunities to share.

When we are looking at our strategic plan and you do one thing really well and I am struggling with it, and it has to be a safe environment, maybe a little bit of peer coaching. How do we create an opportunity for people to share around that topic? We are not going to do book studies. I find that those last all year and then. We are going to pull chapters; we are going to pull articles. We are going to make those the focus for some of that, we are going to see how we wrap systems leadership around the implied or job embedded professional development for principals. Obviously our focus will be on instruction, but not all of that. Our current evaluation system is only about what is happening in the classroom. That's why I like Charlotte Danielson, you're planning, your professionalism. Teaching is more than going into a classroom and teaching. So is being a principal. Its more than just showing up. So that's where I am going to try to focus forward. I am excited we are going to have that Wednesday. Where we are going to devote to our PLC,

our learning lab. Because it's not a true PLC, but we might bring in some data one time. We might bring all that kind of stuck.

## **Appendix C**

### Focus Group Principals

*How was the mentoring experience organized?*

I didn't have a formal organization of a mentor. *Did you have a mentor at all?* The superintendent. I'm in a small district and I was the only elementary principal in the district. And so the superintendent, his office was in my building so he came down and supported me that way. He just came to check in. He encouraged me to join principal organizations, told me to call neighboring districts, like Arlington, and to build relationships that way.

I did not have a formal mentor or a formal mentoring program in the district. That was a question I asked in the interview, if I would get one. Their response was they didn't have a formal mentoring program for administrators. But, here are all the people that will help you and these are the people you go to for those questions. *Were all those people central office or were they, talk to these people because they've been around a long time?* Out of the six principals, three were brand new. One had been there for a very long time, one had been there three years, and one had been there one year. So they said if you have questions, you can ask them, but you can ask the central office. But the people we were



to ask at the central office had never been principals before so or didn't have that role in the past. So we just kind of talked amongst ourselves I guess.

I am the same way, I had a colleague, there were two elementary principals at the time, but it was more reach out to the superintendent, there was a business manager and a sped director, so you functioned as part of that K-12 team. And then it was encouragement to get out to your conference schools and NCSA to build a network.

Mine, too. New and emerging administrators program.

*Stated goals of the mentoring process. What were their goals for your first year?*

Survival.

Make it to June.

Yeah, without hurting anybody.

I know that the ones, the central office people they wanted us to talk to, it was if you had a question about budget, here is who you ask. They did clarify that budget being something because we didn't even know how to do a requisition, a purchase order, where is our credit card, we didn't know where any of that was. It was, here are the keys to the

building. They did say, don't mess that one up (budget). The rest was just, there weren't any goals.

I don't think there were any outlined, but one of my biggest was build the trust of the community and the staff. I was taking over, kind of, a break down situation. There was a lot of mistrust. They asked me, one of the first things they asked me, have you seen our personnel files. I said no. I wasn't even going through them yet. It was building trust. Plus, I walked into a bond issue. So, that was another thing. Community relations. That would've been another of my biggest goals.

Not real clear on the, if there was any formal goal. Not casting in a negative way. It was very personalized and ongoing. In a smaller district, you maybe don't have the formalization of a plan. But you had direct access to a lot of people, that sometimes in a different district, a larger district, they are more removed from that building perspective. So, it kind of comes across as if we didn't have a mentoring. We didn't have, check one, check two, check three

Right.

We did get to ask the assistant superintendent for business, how do I do my budget. The assistant superintendent for curriculum, how would you...

The availability was constant and consistent. They could really personalize and tailor the feedback and the support and the direction and support to us, as an individual because it was, I don't want to say it was more casual, more intimate. More one on one.

Have a sit down. What's coming up? What do you want to do here?

Formative may be the word to describe it. What do you need now? How are your appraisals coming along?

You got accurate information because you got it right from the source; you didn't have to go through anybody. You didn't have to ask a mentor. It might be a benefit of not having a mentor.

The downside is they are also your evaluator.

But there is no middleman. When you asked the, what would you do? You got your answer of what you are going to do.

*Nothing is lost in translation.*

Right.

We also, met, the three of us, for two or three hours and had those conversations. So, the high school principal had been there a while. We had an agenda, even though there were three of us. Sometimes, there was a teacher who did the curriculum at the time. So the four of us would sit down and meet bi-weekly. It was that too.

*Did your support, rather than mentoring, help you focus on instruction? So, did it help your development as an instructional leader?*

I think so. Even though an administrative mentor program would be different than an elementary teacher mentoring program I know that sometimes, that teachers go through a lot of hoops to get to the meat of what they need. I need a mentor for this. I don't need, x, y and z, I need a mentor for this. I guess I didn't have to go through that. I guess also in reflection, I'm selling my district a little short; we did participate in a leadership academy. It wasn't for only new principals. They had every new admin in the district go through it. But there were teachers in there; it really wasn't designed for that purpose. It was something you all did go through.

*What would call it? Would you call it an induction program? This is what you need to know as a leader?*

No. It was for aspiring administrators. It was for if you were looking beyond the classroom. So we did a lot of things with strengthsfinders, stuff like that. It was really similar to some of my coursework at UNO. You could actually take it as a UNI class. I

guess I didn't feel like it mentor me into my new position or my district, but yet you having those conversations. *How long did it last?* It lasted for a year. You met once a month. Of the 26 people in the classroom, there were four principals and the rest of the class was teachers.

If you're trying to think about instructional leadership. The very basic level of what the district did. I was dealing with two high school principals. Nobody had been an elementary so there was a very different flavor at times to what instruction looked like. I had been in a bigger system, prior to moving into that position. So I probably contacted more people in that other district as resources than I did in the small district I became a principal in.

For me, I was I just had completed the fourth year of being a teacher when I became a principal. So I probably learned more about instruction from master teachers in the building and then sharing what I observed there when I was in another classroom. So that was the authentic experience of being in there to give the feedback. Everyone had yearly appraisals so there was plenty of chances to do that. We did the legality pieces for our district admin meetings, keeping a log, are you doing these evaluations, this is how you do an evaluation, so that if you are ever called, you can see here was the training, on an annual basis. As far as the authentic piece, it came by experience in the classrooms. *So even with your conversations with the superintendent, in a large district you might not have that, you wouldn't say that those were focused on instructional support.*

It was more of the legal requirements. If you had a problem come up, you could get that formative feedback from your superintendent right away, but as far as that, it was here is your building. *So, it was the here's your keys kind of things again?* Give me a call if you need anything.

*So as you look back, on whatever kind of experience you had, as a first year principal what do you wish they would have done that they did not do?*

I would have liked more training on the teacher evaluation program that the district uses. They basically said, this is how you log into it. Just some more background type of training. Not only, this is the type of program we are going to use but this is the expectation for it. It was basically, when I went to the training that is what I thought I was going to get all day. Here is a sheet of paper and practice getting logged in. I would've liked to have more technical support about this is how the district does things instead a lot of forgiveness along the way. That's what one administrator said to me one time. If you go into the decision with the best of intentions, even if it is not the decision we would have made, we will never not back you, because we never showed you what we wanted in the first place. So if you can make that effort on this end. And I do like the freedom looking back at it. I think I gained confidence because I just had to figure it out. I didn't have to question, because I figure, it was one of those permission vs. forgiveness type things. So, with my personality, it probably worked out, it was an OK thing. I just would have liked more structure. I'm a pretty systematic person. So that was difficult. I

enjoyed the freedom. And that little bit of comfort, because you can't get mad at me if I don't get it right, because you didn't tell me how to do it right.

You know, but I had budgeting experience, as an asst., I had evaluation experience, and I don't know if there is any training you can do, but when you are making those tough decisions and having those tough conversations, I just remember that being the scariest part of my job. I don't know if anyone can mentor you or if somebody can say ok, this is what I'm thinking. Their expertise and, if you approach it this way, it may go a bit easier. I don't know if that just comes with age and confidence. Just somebody, a sounding board, because you can't go into isolation, to talk to staff and can't have those conversations with the teachers doing this and this is what is going to happen. Like you said, the superintendent is right there, but at the end of the day, they are your supervisor. I could go to him, but it would've been nice to go to someone who says, I've been through this and you should handle it this way.

And that might be some delineation with elementary to other levels. An elementary admin, you tend to be on an island. Whereas, a secondary administrator, you have an AP, and AD, a team you can process and problem solve with before whatever. Where at the elementary, you go into the bathroom and look in the mirror and say, you got this, go get'em tiger. So that has to be...the secretary is kind of like a sorority mom. I learned budgeting reports from my secretary. I learned curriculum reports from my secretary. They are really the gatekeepers of the management that first year or so. You could take on some of those other tasks, because you kind of knew enough to monitor that, but you

were working on parent relations, student relations and getting into the classrooms. Like you said, it has worked for whoever was here before, you got this let me know what you need. She was like the radar on MASH. Here do this, this is done. They were kind of running the building until you could catch up with your understanding.

*So, do you recall in your first year, what are my test scores going to look like. Man, I really don't like how instruction looks here?*

I was lucky, because I walked into a pretty solid instructional setting; they needed to work on culture. And, they wanted affirmation and they did want guidance on the RTI program and the data we were looking at, so I did get to do all that stuff. But I was coming from that as a data coordinator. So that was a comfort area, a passion area for me. But I was also walking into something pretty good. Our test scores were the highest in the district. So that was kind of the backburner. It was running out, realizing that I can't wear heels to work anymore because I would have to break up a fight in the parking lot between two people and I don't run that well in heels. It's embarrassing to fall when you're breaking that up. It was the management piece of it all. I honestly didn't worry about instruction that first year.

I think I took it in a lot. We were in the process of growing up. They had been allowed, prior to that superintendent and prior to me getting there. There might be two sections, and somebody might want to use this math book and someone wanted to use that math book, and there was no consistency in curriculum adoption. So, sometime in that first



year, I sat down with staff and towards the end, and we formulated our philosophy on reading because we were torn between guided reading and whole group. So they had just no scope and sequence. Towards the end, after I started building those relationships, I started focusing on instruction. Started worrying about that, but I didn't go in worrying about it whatsoever.

No, not so much. More piecemeal, isolated, from activity to event, person to person. A lot of that was also; I think this would speak to instruction, as far as having a well-managed classroom. There was a lot of work on, how am I going to react as principal when a kid comes in. Am I strict enough? Am I too strict? Am I supporting the teachers? So that was always the dynamic that was going on, especially until you built that relationship. And for me, that was as they were implementing STARS, so that was some of that accountability piece. *So that was new?* So that started and I started. So that was a nice partnership at the same time. You are doing that level of change implementation to some very established practices, so that was challenging.

*Is there anything else about that novice year, with instructional leadership that you want to say, or you recall that was or was not a part of it, that you want to share at this point?*

I just remember just a lot of hours getting stuff done, because you didn't know what you were doing.

Just reacting, reacting, reacting.

Best laid plans; oh you didn't know about this. That's not going to work and you didn't know that.

I do remember looking at the Omaha paper and seeing which classrooms were open again.

I can remember going home sometimes and thinking, is this what I want to do?

Time management and stress management would've been nice.

I thought about that

I had my son, who was prek/kdg, had an invisible friend, Gene. Gene's dad was gone at meetings all the time and was talking to people all the time. I made that connection.

How do you do your job and how do you take care of yourself and your family? That is exempt in mentoring. I am not even sure we do enough of that today with health and wellness, and jobs.

You know what, you start your doctorate program your first year as a principal. That's what you do.

Why would you not?

## **Appendix D**

### Interviews with Practicing Principals from the Doctoral Program

#### *How was your mentoring experience organized?*

I believe received a phone call, from HR, about a few weeks having been appointed, that named, do I give names, Mr. Perrigo as my mentor. At that time, I was told because he was principal of a building that didn't exist, that is why he was named my mentor. He could possibly be housed in my building. Then, a couple of weeks later, I got another phone call, that he is my mentor, but he would be housed in another building. I guess he was house at Springville, because Susan was new, too. That's really how it was organized. I never saw anything on paper. I never went to a meeting where he was introduced or was at. I was told on the phone and then he emailed or called after that. We had a relationship prior, because where I was at, my previous principal at Jefferson was removed, he took over the building. So he had already kind of been a principal with me. And that's probably the only reason the experience was somewhat successful. We

had a prior relationship, so we didn't have to build one. So, because it was so infrequent and inconsistent, I still felt comfortable. I had literally been ten feet from him for the past two months.

*Were there any stated goals for your mentoring program?*

No. None at all. *Not communicated from the district or from him?* No I don't remember. I remember him emailing me to set up our first visit and at that first visit he kind of said the kinds of things he wanted to help me with. And I remember kind of chuckling in my mind thinking, what if those are not things I wanted help with? But I respected him enough that I just go with whatever he wanted to do. So, that's what we did. And it mostly dealt with budget. I think he really wanted to make sure my budget was safe and sound and that I knew what I was spending.

*How did or did, your mentoring support you as an instructional leader?*

Not at all. I would say there was no support as instructional leader at all. I would say we never talked about instruction at any of our meetings, of which there were three. We never talked about it once. At that point, that was Dr. Ks first year of really rolling out any kind of district-wide uniform, when she first came out with her action plan, coaching, literacy strategies across content areas, it was that year. I remember having to package that, there weren't any turnkeys yet, and being as a first year principal, like holy buckets, this would be my first year. I didn't get my first year and then she rolled this out, it was my first year. And he never once talked to me about it. It was me having to really think

about how to package this for the teachers, because I thought it was a good package, how do I roll this out and become this instructional leader, when really I had been trained to run a building. I think you are picked because you are somewhat charismatic. I think you are picked because they think people will follow your lead. But I wasn't really trained to come in and be a coach. To be a coach, to analyze data, student achievement data. *Did they do any of that with you in New Principal Induction?* No, not all. I remember possibly C and L bringing a binder and getting like two hours of time and getting that. I remember coming in and spending about two hours talking about that action, Renae's stuff. But as far as implementation and how to roll that out, no, it was a binder. I remember every group brought a binder, at induction, and I remember getting back to my building and I am going to put these all in a binder and organize it and then never touched it. It was never useful.

*What do wish your mentor would have done to support you as an instructional leader?*

I guess I wish I would've been asked, what do you want, what do you want to work with. I guess I knew what my strengths were and what my weaknesses were and I would've spent time on my weaknesses. I enjoyed school finance, and he knew that. I did budget with him at Jefferson and budget was not one of my weaknesses. I kind of felt that he wanted to go off his strengths and I would have wanted more for him to assist me with data analysis, because I was never IF, I didn't have that ADR (academic data rep) piece, that a lot of principals and Ifs have. I didn't know a lot about Acuity. I wanted some help and I didn't know a lot about NESAs, that would've been the second year. I didn't know about nesa and that's what I wanted help with and I had to go somewhere else for it.

Or not have it at all. *Did you got to other new principals or your friends in other buildings?* Yes. I went to Ilka, she was new that year. So, she and I, all year long. And then, because of my relationship with Donna, I did call the director of elementary education multiple times and or text her and she would help me. Or yeah, established principals. People I knew, informally. Help me out. That's why I don't mind taking those calls today. I still get those calls today. People are calling saying, what the heck do I do with these things and we help them.

*The only other thing I want to ask about, the transition? Did the district say to you, go meet with Mr. Hall and go over x y z or You and Mr. Hall get together and handle it?*

The latter...more here to be added about transition

## Practicing Principal Interview 2

*How was your mentoring experience organized?*

I was assigned a mentor by the district. HR said here is your mentor. The person was given to me. *And, what was the, did they lay out a meeting schedule or hey, this is what it is going to look like?* So I can talk about this both ways. Because I was, and this year I got to be the mentor. As a mentee, as a new admin in Millard, we go through our induction program for the first two years, and as a part of that, you meet with your mentor, and kind of what that relationship is defined within that meeting so that everyone

has that same understanding. SO when I was a new principal, Dr. Fink, Beth Fink was assigned to me. My mentor. So, it was kind of the expectation was a monthly contact would happen, and then just more of just check-ins, so I could call her for anything and she would reach out on her own, just to see what was happening with me. She shared with me, and I don't know if she was supposed to, a lot of her systems approach to leadership at Central, and that was kind of how my mind was working, too. So how do all three administrators do the same? So if you want to do a field day, how do the teachers know what that system is, so systems for everything. Kind of to align, to instruction I guess, she talked a lot about with me, about, peer observations and walk-throughs, our observations, what do we see and how do we define what good instruction is. So she really talked about how she really tried to instill in her admin team, so when they did observations, they are all looking for the same thing. So, as a mentor, I had the chance to mentor Marshall Smith, at Kiewit this year, and he's a little different because he was an assistant for Beth Fink for seven years, we went through Doane together and he got a job here as an assistant in Millard, and I got a job I Bellevue, and he worked for Beth for a number of years as an assistant and knew the systems and knew the thinking, her approach. We just talked about relationships and the difference between assistant and principals, the different challenges you might face and I shared some of my learning, the office dynamics. What surprised me, what I didn't expect, because our relationship is different, because he worked for Beth, to be honest we didn't do a whole lot of instructional systems talk, we did a little bit, you know, but it was more what was his style, vs. her style, and Dr. Phipps style, because she was there at Kiewit before as principal, how do you transition that to your own.

*Was there a document, anywhere, that says this is Millard's principal mentorship looks like, this is our goals for the program, that they gave you guys?*

During the powerpoints, they kind of explained the general expectation, they kind of went over it with the mentor does and what it is and does. Is there a document? I am not going to say there wasn't but I don't recall, anything check mark, check mark, things that I went through. *And then no feedback form either, this is how it is going, where you put on paper, or your mentee puts on paper this is how things are going, this is how I feel I have been supported, anything like that?* Not that I can recall. *And that is pretty much everyone.* For us, it was pretty much just the conversation. For Beth, she opened the door wide enough that I would call her about anything and everything, sometimes to just kind of shoot the breeze, sometimes to talk philosophy, and sometimes, it's hey, what do you do in this situation? I probably reached out to Marshall more than he reached out to me, but again that some of his personality, some is his experience in taking on the job. The only expectation I really clearly got, just the expectation of checking in and checking in often. To the point that on my calendar I would literally make appointments to call marshall. And I know Beth did the same thing because every Friday at 10:30, an email or a phone call. So I just tried to mirror that. I think the issue is that everybody comes with so many different packages that it's tough, to have a one-size-fits-all set of things that helps support them. *Did you attend district meetings with them? You go to a district meeting, you sitting with Beth? Or you're sitting with Marshall?* Maybe, only a couple. The first and the last. Maybe the middle and last. No more than a couple.



*So, we have already kind of talked about what were the stated goals of the mentoring program. So for you, you kind of got, making contact on the regular basis. Does that kind of sum it up?*

Yup.

*Some of these are going to kind of overlap with things you have already said, but how did mentoring support your development as an instructional leader?*

I came into the principalship, with different experiences learned along the way. So when I was teaching, when I was in Bellevue, I was in two different buildings in Bellevue, then when I had my principal here, Dr. Wilson, here for five years. So I had those perspectives and each place you go you kind of learn this is what I would do or wouldn't do, and then Beth just added another layer to that. I wanted to do the systems things, but I had never experience that in a way that she does it. It was almost like, if I could have picked a mentor, it would have been Beth, because I wanted that experience and that insight. And again, the systems approach, how she plans things and handles things and kind of that systemic, we have these things in place to handle these things and this is how we envision it, two three years down the line. And again, I got a ton of that from Beth, from that angle. So the rest of it, was what do you do with you're small little questions here, the outliers, the systemic systems approach is what I got from her the most I would say. I think that was a new perspective I didn't have in my experience, or see anywhere else. *It was just theoretical; you knew about it, you'd never worked within it?*

*When you think about your experience, as a mentee, that you wish your mentor would have done to support you as an instructional leader?*

You know to go along with that, if we were to have had a specific, instructional conversation I would have enjoyed, I like it when people sit down. If you were to sit down and tell me what you are looking for in instruction. Because what you look for might be different than what I look for and how we define it. Because every time you have that conversation you gain a little bit. I think I might have missed out because we never really had that conversation, I mean that is really getting a lot of areas I probably would have gained a lot from her, but I never really had that opportunity.

*What was your transition process into this role like? Was it, here are the keys and have a good summer? Here, you're going to meet with the outgoing principal and go over things? Was it your entry plan you do for the district?*

For me, as an assistant for 5 years and taking over for a principal who was leaving was good and bad with that. So at first, it was who's decision is this and the whole relationship dynamic between him and myself changed overnight. Wow, I didn't expect that. And she would meet with me weekly, every Friday, and went over certain topics. And at first, she drove the topics, budget, staffing, and things as an assistant that I didn't quite manage or deal with, so she would fill me in. On the side, I was assigned a mentor about that same time, so at the same time that's happening and I am meeting with her and talking about next year and through her conversations, that would help me with topics,

the whole systems approach and why do we do this and why not. Not that you want to, delicate conversation. So that was one piece and, obviously, the district had their new principal induction program outside of that with them, all the newbies for the next two years. Going through and having specific conversations there, learn from others across the district, elementary to high school. We talked about a variety of different things, relationships and communication and teacher evaluations, policy and xyz, more of a global perspective so we could all share. So it was a little bit of both locally and district-wide, so we could get it from there and the rest was my getting to work to figure it out.

