

University of Nevada, Reno

**A Comparative Case Study: The Expectations and Experiences of Current and
Aspiring Female Secondary Assistant Principals**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

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THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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prepared under our supervision by

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Abstract

The assistant principal role is often a critical stepping stone in educational leadership. The position provides a great deal of exposure and experience between classroom teacher and the principalship. However, there are few studies that examine the role, particularly with women. As women acquire increased educational experience and qualifications to pursue the educational leadership pathway, the role of assistant principal becomes foundational and transformative to their leadership journey. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, expectations, and aspirations of women who are currently secondary assistant principals compared to women who aspire to the role. A qualitative research methodology was used with a comparative case study design. This included the experiences of eight female, secondary assistant principals and eight women who have the pertinent qualifications and are aspiring to the role. The results indicated that women have unique experiences in the position, especially in terms of work-life balance. A clear pathway to the assistant principal role was also evident and included a call to action, the dean of students role, and a transition into the AP position. Implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and conclusions are discussed.

I dedicate this to educators. For our enduring work building up the next generation.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Though women make up the majority of the teaching force in the United States (U.S.), they make up the minority of educational leaders (Bitterman et al., 2013; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Superville, 2017; U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2004). Women earn more educational leadership degrees and have more experience in the classroom than their male counterparts (Eckman, 2004; Grogan & Brunner, 2005). However, men continue to ascend the school leadership ranks more frequently than women. This results in women doing the work while men make the decisions and create policies in many school districts across the nation.

There is extensive research on many different facets of school leadership. However, much of the research tends to focus on superintendents and school principals—oftentimes, it does not include other members of a school leadership team (Barnett et al., 2012; Cohen & Schechter, 2019). Consequently, assistant principals (APs) are most notably left out of the bulk of existing research on school leaders. Because most K-12 schools have an AP, and the assistant principalship is the most common path to the school principal (McGough, 2003), this position should have a more prominent place in the academic research to understand the expectations and experiences of the role. Yet, women in educational leadership, especially those who are APs, are historically understudied groups. Given the existing gap in the literature and the important contributions that women can offer to the decision-making process in education, it remains important to better understand women in educational leadership. Particularly female APs who aspire to or have embarked upon the unique demands of educational leadership.

Successes for Female School Leaders

One of the critical roles of a school leader is instructional leader within the school. Women tend to see instructional leadership as a more challenging role than males (71% vs. 29%), but they feel better prepared (65% vs 35%) to conduct this role (Barnett et al., 2012). Perhaps because women often spend more time in the classroom before ascending the school leadership ladder (Eckman, 2004; Grogan & Brunner, 2005), they may bring more strength to instructional leadership due to their plethora of experience when compared to their male counterparts. Interestingly, Reis et al. (1999) confirmed that female assistant principal applicants also received significantly higher evaluations than their male counterparts.

Additionally, female high school principals are more likely than their male counterparts to be hired in their own district (Eckman, 2004). Grogan and Brunner (2005) reached a parallel conclusion for female superintendents, finding that men are twice as likely as women to be appointed from the outside. In turn, women may build stronger bonds in their positions that allow them to be promoted within the community that they already work (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

The focus on relationships with the various constituents of a school community is crucial for women. Grogan and Brunner (2005) specifically explored the connection between gender and the superintendency. Of note, their research and conclusions are applicable to various female school leadership positions—not just superintendents. More female (58%) than male (24%) superintendents held undergraduate degrees in education. Women's academic preparation for the superintendent position is more current, 47% of women earned their highest degree within the past 10 years compared to 36% of men.

Female superintendents report more professional development activities in curriculum and instruction. Female superintendents reported interpersonal skills and the ability to maintain organizational relationships and responsiveness to parents and community groups as the most important factors for success in their careers (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

For the position of superintendent, women “emerge as community builders, grounded in knowledge of the curriculum and instruction and prepared to stay the course of leading school districts across the country” (Grogan & Brunner, 2005, p. 50). It has been argued that they are more qualified, have more experience, and foster positive and community centered cultures. The common characteristics, skills, and qualifications associated with women tends to be associated with effectively serving school communities, so it is imperative for more women to emerge as educational leaders throughout the country.

Role of the Assistant Principal

With the acknowledgment that limited research has been conducted on APs (Barnett et al., 2012; Cohen & Schechter, 2019), the role has often been referred to as the forgotten leader (Cranston et al., 2004). The role of the AP is largely dependent on the vision of the principal and the structure of the school; however, the AP serves an integral role to a school and on the school’s leadership team (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Often the expectations of the role of the AP have been limited because the principal is viewed as a leader, but the assistant principal is viewed as a manager (Cranston et al., 2004). This does not give APs high levels of autonomy to decide what responsibilities should be of focus. It can also be limiting for them to use their job as an

AP to grow within their leadership capacities. They must attend to the vision of the principal and fill in as needed for the school and staff.

With minimal exploration into the role of APs, two main task categories have been used to encompass this particular role—managing student needs and instructional leadership (Barnett et al., 2012; Cohen & Schechter, 2019). These task categories are broad and are quite varied. However, the work of an AP is primarily concentrated in managing student needs, though most assistant principals prefer to focus on the tasks involved with instructional leadership (Cohen & Schechter, 2019). This can be a deterrent for individuals to pursue the road to an assistant principal because they will spend significant time on tasks that are difficult, demanding, and less desirable.

Statement of the Problem

Although women make up the majority of the teaching force, they face significant obstacles that impede their ability to be in leadership positions, beginning with the role of the AP. Yet, there is limited research that has focused on the unique experiences that women have as they pursue leadership and the challenges that they may face once they attain leadership positions. It is critical to understand these barriers that women encounter at each of the step of the leadership trajectory, but especially the entry level AP role.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, expectations, and aspirations of women who are currently secondary assistant principals compared to women who aspire to the role. In the first group, the AP participants had the opportunity to reflect upon their path to school leadership, including their motivations to pursue the assistant principalship. They also shared their experiences

in the role, including their daily responsibilities, relationships with students and staff, and challenges they work to overcome. In the second group, participants who aspire to the AP role were asked to share their motivations for leadership, their anticipations of what the position will entail, and discuss their hopes and goals for the future of their educational careers.

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was used with a comparative case study design. The case study design was the appropriate approach for this research because exploratory questions about women and their leadership experiences were used, and this does not require control over behavioral events but focuses on contemporary society (Yin, 2018). Additionally, because the study is meant to gain information about the experiences with a comparison about unique leadership experiences between females who are currently APs and those who aspire to the role, a comparative case study was fitting (Stake, 2006). Therefore, the bounded case includes individuals from two distinct pathways of leadership: women who are currently in the role of assistant principal and those aspiring to the role of assistant principal. Thus, the following research questions guided the focus of this study:

1. What are female leaders' and aspiring female leaders' perceptions and expectations of the assistant principal?
2. How do female leaders and aspiring female leaders understand the pathway to the assistant principal role?

Several data sources were used for this study. All participants engaged in semi-structured interviews. The practicing APs were asked to share their experiences by

discussing their motivations to pursue leadership, the details of their current role, and their future aspirations. The aspiring APs were asked to share their experiences, discuss their expectations about their future leadership roles, and reflect upon their motivations. The semi-structured interview data were supported by an examination of the district's human resources (HR) data. This district HR data includes AP job descriptions (Appendixes C and D), hiring statistics for school leadership positions, hiring policies and procedures for administrators, and the administrative salary schedule (Appendix B). Yin (2018) highlighted that it is crucial for case study research to include multiple sources of evidence because the goal is to complete an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon in its real-world context. These supportive sources provides more information and context for the research.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was Social Role theory. For this study, the central tenet of Social Role theory is that the differences between the behaviors of men and women in social settings stem from society dividing men and women into different social roles that are typical of the behaviors of men and women (Eagly, 1987; White, 2018). The traditional societal roles and expectations are for men to be school leaders by assuming assistant principal and principal jobs and women to remain teachers in the classroom. It is, therefore, difficult and far more challenging for women to take on the roles and behaviors of a job that is traditionally considered masculine. Women must assume not only the heavy responsibilities of the job but also the societal pressures of doing a job that is typically associated with men.

Significance of the Study

This research is important because it adds to the limited body of work that has focused on assistant principals. Most educational research focuses on principals and superintendents (Barnett et al., 2012; Cohen & Schechter, 2019), which ignores the role of the assistant principal. This role is fundamental to both the performance of a school and the pathway to further school leadership (McGough, 2003). Findings of this study will also provide insight into the demands of the role of assistant principals from two unique groups among women, rather than simply those who are in the role. Therefore, it is critical to understand the experiences women have as they ascend the leadership ladders within education. It is not enough to know that there are more males in educational leadership than females (Bitterman et al., 2013; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Superville, 2017; ED, 2004). It is necessary to understand why such patterns exist in the field of educational leadership. This research provides first-hand accounts of the expectations of the AP role, along with specific challenges that may prevent women from meeting their leadership aspirations. District leaders, current site leaders, and those aiming to navigate the leadership pathway can use the information to help improve outcomes for all involved but specifically for more women in educational leadership.

Delimitations

This study will be confined to one large school district in the western United States. The school district educates approximately 64,000 students across 96 schools. It is the second largest school district in the state. The middle and high schools that aspiring and current assistant principals work for range in the student population size, social economic status, geographic location, academic achievement levels, and graduation rate.

The middle schools serve either Grades 6-8 or Grades 7-8. Each high school serves Grades 9-12. The schools also do not have a uniform composition of the administrative team. The middle schools have at least one assistant principal and principal, along with a dean of students in some schools. All high schools all have at least one dean of students, one assistant principal, and one principal.

Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to a small group of female participants who aspired to the AP role and those currently in the role of AP. Additionally, all women that are interviewed with positions in the same school district may be limited to specific contexts within that districts. Therefore, the findings of this study will not be generalizable. Generalizability refers to an assumption that the findings of a study can be generalized to the entire population that the participants represent (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). However, qualitative research cannot be generalized because it does not meet the minimum sampling requirements to make the results generalizable. The study is limited to a snap-shot of time for all women, which does not provide an opportunity to explore their leadership trajectory from a longitudinal view. As such, their shared experiences, motivations, and aspirations could change over time and will not be captured by this work.

Definition of Terms

Assistant Principal (AP)

Definition: a job in which the person assists the primary school leader, or principal; the tasks of the assistant principal varies based upon the needs of the

school and the demands of the principal; sometimes also referred to as vice principal (Barnett et al., 2012).

Social Role Theory

Definition: gender-related difference in behavior is mostly the result of a social construction process (Li et al., 2021).

Triangulation

Definition: using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018).

Organization of the Study

Three chapters are included in this proposal. Chapter One focuses on the introduction to the study and general information about method. Chapter Two provides a review of related literature, with a focus on the pathways to school leadership, the demands of school leadership, the role of the assistant principal, the successes and challenges of school leaders, and female school leadership. Chapter Three includes details related to the methodology, such as the details of the comparative case study and in-depth detail of the design of the study. Chapter Four shares the results of the study, including themes that emerged from the participant interviews. Finally, Chapter Five encompasses a discussion of the results, in addition to recommendations and conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

School leaders have a profound impact, good and bad, on all of the constituents of school community, particularly students, staff, and parents (Ahmad et al., 2017; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Oleszewski, 2012). Because of this long-reaching impact, it is important that school principals are experienced and understand the demands and responsibilities of their position in order to ensure they have a positive impact on staff and students. However, it is a unique position for which preparation is a challenge (Barnett et al., 2012). To embark upon a preparation process, educators who hope to assume a principalship often must, at a minimum, earn a graduate degree in educational leadership, have school or district leadership experience, and/or engage in a formalized principal training program.

The principalship has often been reserved for the ideal principal candidates—White, Protestant, heterosexual males—who are then provided authority over a predominantly female teaching force (Blount, 1998, 2005; Rousmaniere, 2013). For example, a focus on gender differences reveals that, though 76% of teachers in the U.S. are women (Superville, 2017), only 55% of suburban principals are females (Bitterman et al., 2013). Certainly, there is a glaring discrepancy between the number of female teachers and the number of female leaders in the American public school system.

Women, therefore, face unique challenges as they assume school leadership positions in their communities. The recruitment of qualified women is becoming increasingly more challenging for these roles, particularly as the demands of the position continue to increase. It is critical to better understand women's experiences and challenges in order to support their school leadership pathway.

School Leadership Pathways

It is well-known that all school leaders are tasked with a broad range of responsibilities. At the same time, it is essential to understand how principals attain their positions in order to inform the preparation and pathway for future principals. McGough (2003) conducted qualitative research into the career paths of 23 school principals to understand how they came to the principalship. Five distinct influences were identified as important intervals of a principal's pathway: (a) childhood and early schooling influences, (b) college and professional training influences, (c) first interval of a career—teacher and teacher leader—influences, (d) second interval of a career—entry-level educational administrator—influences, and (e) third interval of a career—regular principalship—influences. Ultimately, these differing influences create a roadmap for individuals as they pursue their own unique path within school leadership. It is a combination of these influences throughout the intervals of an educator's career that can lead to the principalship.

There tend to be four traditional routes that lead to the principalship: direct, teacher leader, school leader, and classic (McGough, 2003). Though the destination for all four pathways is the same—a principalship—the different paths provide leaders with different opportunities and experiences to draw from as they arrive at the principalship role.

Two of the more uncommon routes are the direct and school leader paths. The direct route includes moving from a teaching position to an entry-level principalship (i.e. interim principal, principal internship, or teaching principalship) to a regular principalship. This is not common and does not provide a great deal of preparation for the

tasks and responsibilities a principal will ultimately assume. The school leader route includes moving from a director of an educational program or leader of a nonpublic school into a traditional public school principalship.

The teacher leader route has become increasingly more popular. It involves the most diverse and varying routes and includes a teacher leader role between teaching and the principalship. A teacher leader role can include curriculum specialist, staff development coordinator, special education specialist, coach, gifted education coordinator, department head, athletic director, and resource room teacher; though it is important to remember that many other teacher leader positions exist throughout school districts across the country. This pathway has become more popular as teacher leader roles have become more formal and defined and the role of teacher leader has become an important part of the road to principal (Education Week, 2017).

Finally, the classic route is the most popular and involves starting as a teacher, moving to an assistant principalship, and then finally assuming a regular principalship. This is “most typically imagined as a pathway to the principalship and it may be evolving into a norm” (McGough, 2003, p. 456).

Because many individuals pursue the classic route and are APs before they assume a principalship, it is imperative that the AP role adequately prepare them to take full responsibility of a school and all of the responsibilities that come with it. However, this route can be challenging as APs often find that the preparation for their job is often insufficient and traditionally designed primarily for principals, not APs (Cohen & Schechter, 2019). Other APs reported that though they may have clear targets for the

goals they are supposed to help schools reach, the initiation and orientation process for APs is lacking (Watson, 2005).

In other words, many APs begin their jobs with insufficient preparation. To remedy this problem, Oleszewski et al. (2012) recommend a reconfiguration of the AP role, including clear boundaries that are consistent across multiple schools and districts for assistant principals and principals. This will not only help individuals be stronger in their roles as APs, but it will also help them be better prepared and more effective principals in the future.

Mentorship

One critical piece of the trajectory of a school leader is mentoring. Traditionally, APs and other entry level school leaders are mentored by principals or other higher-level leadership teams. Cohen and Schechter (2019) argue that this is critical to the success of assistant principals and aids them in their path, “the mentoring process for new assistant principals is usually carried out by the principals and has been found to be a major factor aiding the assistant principals to develop a sense of high professional efficacy and the ability to cope with problems and conflicts that arise from the field” (p. 106). Mentoring is one of the most fundamental pieces of the journey into school leadership and the principalship. It is a relationship that creates a stepping stone as assistant principals eventually look to take on their own principalship.

Cranston (2004) also concluded that there is a need for good mentorships for principals and other school leaders. Mentoring can be particularly helpful in assisting assistant principals into understanding what the job entails in terms of professional development and instructional leadership. Assistant principals historically have less

experience in the areas of professional development and instructional leadership (Barnett et al., 2012; Cohen & Schechter, 2019), which means novice principals are often inexperienced in these areas. A strong mentor relationship has the potential to help them meet these needs of their staff and students from the start of the principalship.

Principal Preparation Programs

When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) became law in 2001, there was a call for more highly qualified teachers and more highly qualified administrators to lead those teachers, particularly in struggling schools (ED, 2004). Thus, formalized principal preparation programs in non-university settings began. These programs provide background knowledge and training for individuals who have limited experiences in a school setting but want to pursue school leadership. The programs are designed to recruit, train and retain leaders attuned to the challenges of urban and first-ring districts: poverty, high student mobility, crime, unemployment and achievement gaps between students of different races and ethnic backgrounds (ED, 2004). They are different from traditional principal preparation programs that often consist of a graduate degree in educational leadership.

Typically, formalized leadership trainings are not connected with traditional university education and take into account that “traditional education administration programs and certification procedures are producing insufficient numbers of these [effective] leaders” (ED, 2004, p. 3). The specialized programs include Boston Principal Fellowship, First Ring Leadership Academy, LAUNCH (Leadership Academy for Urban Network for Chicago), NJ EXCEL (New Jersey Expedited Certification for Educational Leadership), New Leaders for New Schools, and Principals Excellence Program. These

programs place anywhere from 25% to 100% of their graduates into administrative leadership positions—principal, assistant principal, and central office administrators (ED, 2004).

There is skepticism about this kind of training that eliminates teaching and school leadership experience as requirements for tenures in school leadership. Fenwick and Pierce (2001) use the lessons learned from alternative certification programs for teachers and share concern about the same outcomes for alternative preparation for principals and school leaders: “the lack of training in instruction hurts non-traditional teachers and their students” (p. 28). Particularly in a time of increased accountability for schools and administrative teams, there is great value in having school leaders with educational backgrounds and experiences.

Research on school leadership pathways demonstrates that the school leadership trajectory can include a variety of steps for aspiring school leaders. Formally, most paths include teaching experience, a graduate degree, and some form of leadership experience—culminating in an assistant principal or principal role. Informally, a variety of influences can impact an individual’s desire to become a school leader, including childhood educators. However, it is evident that a mentor relationship is critical to the success of an aspiring school leader. In recent years, a push for more school leaders has created demand for focused principal preparation programs, but those kinds of programs are often met with skepticism because they do not include much experience in the school environment.

Demands of the School Leader

It is also critical to understand the demands, roles, and responsibilities of school leaders—this includes principals, assistant principals, deans of students, etc. On any given school day, school administrators must be prepared to discipline students, brainstorm lesson ideas with teachers, meet with community members and parents, and create policy for their schools—and these are just some examples of the countless responsibilities that reside with a school’s administrative team. These activities require strong management and leadership of the administrative team (Portin et al., 2003). Because of all of these different areas and activities that demand attention, principals and school leaders must be prepared for the variety of activities they may face. The tasks they must be prepared to take on change from day to day and school to school. All school administrators must be prepared to lead their staff and students through instructional, cultural, managerial, human resources, strategic, external development, and micropolitical needs (Portin et al., 2003).

School leaders must wear many different hats within the realm of their job. They manage their staff, work with students, are instructional leaders for teachers within the school, and consider the needs of their whole school community (Portin et al., 2003). Higgs (2017) identified the hats women in educational leadership must wear within their position as teamwork; program management; leadership of research programs; system leadership; student supervision, mentoring, and role modeling; communicator; and, external representation and liaison. The list of responsibilities for a school leader is extensive.

Because of their many responsibilities, it can be difficult for principals to know what to prioritize in order to be most effective. For instance, Ahmad et al. (2017) shared: “Principals are aware of much of the research concerning what it means to be effective and understand the importance of their job. The concern has always been where to spend their time, knowing they need to be efficient managers and effective instructional leaders” (p. 144). Therefore, in order to examine the effective practices of school administrators across all of the realms in which they work, different categories of a school administrator’s job are considered. School leaders must balance effective practice in each of these categories to best meet the needs of all constituents of their school community to the best of their ability. These categories are the school administrator as a manager of staff, an instructional leader, and an advocate for students.

School Administrator as a Manager of Staff

To manage school staff (e.g., certified and classified employees), school leaders have many different people and responsibilities to negotiate. Important elements in this area of their work include keeping staff morale high and creating leaders on their staff (Huggins et al., 2016). For example, these leaders include department leaders, grade level team leaders, and members of a school leadership team. School leaders must work to inspire staff and foster leadership skills and qualities among the school staff. The more that principals and assistant principals engage in a form of shared leadership, the more satisfied staff tends to be (Huggins et al., 2016). Although the leader is managing staff, a specific focus on shared leadership in this effort allows a school administrator to be more focused and concentrated on the many demands of the leadership role. In other words,

principals and other administrators can then delegate some of their daily tasks and responsibility, which narrows their wide responsibilities.

Another important managerial responsibility of leaders is centered on hiring. Administrators are at the forefront of the hiring process within their school, which is not a responsibility to take lightly. In their study of everyday practices of principals, Portin et al. (2003) found that, “Across the board, school leaders singled out the importance of hiring and inducting teachers for their schools...Human resource leadership included both teaching (certified) and support (classified) staff” (p. 25). School administrators are responsible for ensuring that the right people are in the right jobs to maximize school performance and student achievement. When the right person is in the right position, it allows for each school to function at its highest capacity, but because recruitment and hiring has its challenges, this area remains a major part of the leader’s management demands. Altogether, it is evident that administrators play a significant role in the day-to-day management of their staff (Portin et al., 2003). Leaders must not only work to hire the right people, but they must also keep those people inspired to support continuous improvement efforts.

School Administrator as an Instructional Leader

In national studies, principals rank their most important responsibility as supervision of instruction (Fenwick & Pierce, 2001). When a principal or assistant principal is serving as an instructional leader, a primary function is for them to provide informal and formal feedback to teachers about their instructional practices for classroom and whole-school improvement (Tuytens & Devos, 2017). It is critical that school administrators work with classroom teachers to balance classroom needs with

overarching school goals (Tuytens & Devos, 2017). For example, a school that has decided to focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) will need those skills built into classrooms as well as day-to-day practices within the school. It is the administrator's job to help teachers develop those instructional skills to accomplish that schoolwide goal (Tuytens & Devos, 2017). Because a school's administrative team is ultimately responsible for setting schoolwide goals and is often held accountable for reaching them, it is important that they provide feedback to all teacher practices that help teachers work toward those goals.

However, the principal must also consider what teachers value in terms of feedback. Teachers want to work for administrators who have necessary classroom and teaching experience and can guide them in their classroom practices (Tuytens & Devos, 2017). Teachers want specific feedback that will help them improve their day-to-day teaching. This makes it imperative that school leaders prioritize their role as instructional leaders within the school community.

A positive relationship between an administrator and a teacher has the potential to create better instruction in classrooms throughout a school. For example, Supovitz et al. (2010) conclude that, "principals who focus on instruction, foster community and trust, and clearly communicate school mission and goals are associated with teachers who report making a greater degree of changes to their instructional practice" (pp. 43-44).

Transactional instructional relationships refers to the interactions school leaders and teachers have as they discuss and engage with classroom instruction. It is important for administrators to focus on transactional instructional relationships with teachers in order to foster better classroom instruction. This leadership approach to curriculum and

instruction has the potential to improve student achievement outcomes (Supovitz et al., 2010). In fact, the more educational leaders focus their time and attention on teaching and learning within their schools, the greater influence they have on student performance (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Furthermore, Supovitz et al. (2012) concluded that, when principals and other administrators create a culture within their school that focuses on better instruction for the entire staff, teachers improve based on feedback and conversations from administrators, teacher-to-teacher conversations and growth about effective practices also improve. A positive school culture has an even more robust impact on teacher performance and, consequently, student academic growth.

The most important and fundamental role of an effective administrator is that of an instructional leader within the school. An instructional leader is a leader who provides feedback on teacher's instruction in order to help teachers improve their classroom practice. Though that role can vary between mentoring teachers one-on-one or creating a staff culture that celebrates discussion and implementation of best practices, the administrator has the potential to have a significant, positive impact on the instructional practices of his or her school (Supovitz et al., 2010).

School Administrator as an Advocate for Students

Not only do school administrators manage staff and serve to improve school instruction, they also foster relationships with the students who attend their schools (Branch et al., 2013). An effective school leader who can create foundational relationships can assist in the students' performance. Branch et al. (2013) determine that "highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by

between two and seven months of learning in a single school year” (p. 63). Principals and assistant principals cannot simply function behind the scenes of their schools; they must be front and center working with the most important population within their school: the students. Unfortunately, if that does not happen, Branch et al. (2013) also conclude that ineffective principals lower the achievement of students within the school. The relationships administrators build with their students has the potential to have a positive or negative impact on the student body. This keystone relationship cannot be ignored.

Other findings indicate that administrators need time within their school to create and develop environments that foster a love of learning and improvement of student achievement. Administrators need time to get to know their school as they develop a plan to improve student achievement and staff outcomes (Coelli & Green, 2012). Leaders are often evaluated and criticized almost immediately upon entering their positions. However, the more time school administrators have to implement changes to fit their goals and align school culture with their beliefs, the more opportunities they have to create long-term changes and see positive results from their changes (Coelli & Green, 2012).

Overall, school leaders, like teachers, have the potential to create lasting change that positively impacts the achievement of their student body (Branch et al., 2013). Improvements in student achievement and a positive school culture for students happen when effective administrators are working within a school. Although school leadership demands are broad, diverse, and in constant flux, all leaders must balance the needs of students, staff, parents, and community members. School leaders must be adept and ready for any and all daily challenges.

Role of Assistant Principal

While the aforementioned areas can bring clarity to the role of school leadership, most existing research is centered on principals and superintendents. There is limited research on the role of the assistant principal (Barnett et al., 2012; Cohen & Schechter, 2019), such that the assistant principal is often referred to as the forgotten leader (Cranston et al., 2004). The role of the AP is largely dependent on the vision of the principal and the structure of the school; however, it is clear that the assistant principal serves an integral role to a school and the school's leadership team (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Furthermore, because the AP position is often a critical step for aspiring school principals (McGough, 2003), it is a position that requires further exploration.

Nationally, the expectations for APs are very broad across schools and districts. However, Watson (2005) compiled data from 57 job descriptions for APs and determined three broad categories of assistant principalships. First, a quasi-deputy head, who is equivalent to the deputy head or principal. Second, a subordinate deputy head, who is below the principal but serves as additional senior management. Third, a niche assistant head, who has a job specifically relevant to the school which operates at a high level. The roles and responsibilities vary greatly for each of the different categories, and it is primarily left to the principal to determine how the AP will fit in with the school's administrative team and school staff overall. Still, the variation in roles and responsibilities of this position, can make it difficult for candidates to be prepared for the responsibilities for their job, especially with individualized contexts in each school setting.

The expectations related to the role of the assistant principal have also been narrow for assistant principals because the principal is often viewed as a leader and the assistant principal is often viewed as a manager (Cranston et al., 2004). This does not give APs a great deal of autonomy to decide what responsibilities to focus on. It can also be limiting for them to use their job as an AP to grow within their leadership capacities. They must attend to the vision of the principal and fill in as s/he feels necessary based on what is best for the school and staff.

The limited research on assistant principals indicates that there are two main task categories for this position—managing student needs and instructional leadership (Barnett et al., 2012; Cohen & Schechter, 2019). These task categories are broad and have a great deal of variety as to which tasks fall under each category. However, the work of an AP is primarily concentrated in managing student needs; though most assistant principals prefer to focus on the tasks involved with instructional leadership (Cohen & Schechter, 2019). This can be a deterrent for more individuals to pursue the road to becoming an assistant principal.

Managing Student Needs

Historically, assistant principals carry out duties and responsibilities related to managing student needs, such as attending to school bus routines, disruptive students, parent complaints, lunch duty, scheduling coverage, and administrative paperwork (Barnett et al., 2012). Glanz (1994) conducted research into the actual duties of assistant principals. Of all assistant principals involved, 90% of respondents indicated that their duties primarily include student discipline, lunch duty, school scheduling (coverages),

ordering textbooks, parental conferences, assemblies, administrative duties, and graduation.

The extensive duties and responsibilities often hinder an APs ability to focus on actual leadership practices within a school. Indeed, Cranston et al.'s (2004) work found that assistant principals are often so preoccupied with maintenance of day-to-day operations of a school that they have few opportunities to practice true educational leadership. As such, APs can struggle to find enjoyment from the bureaucratic tasks and responsibilities of their job (Balikçi, 2020). It also means they do not have as many opportunities to have exposure to tasks that will best prepare them for future principalship.

Instructional Leadership

While attending to student needs is a significant portion of an assistant principal's demands, the role is changing into something more dynamic for schools. For example, Barnett (2012) indicated that "there is a push from district leaders and professional organizations to re-purpose the duties of the assistant principal to include more instructional leadership responsibilities" (p. 93). Assistant principals are also now responsible for vision and goals, coaching and evaluating teachers, developing and managing curriculum and instructional programs, communicating with stakeholders, and making data-based decisions for students and schools.

Glanz (1994) found that, although 90% of assistant principals spent most of their time on managing a variety of student needs, 90% ranked instructional leadership duties as more important than student management. These duties include teacher training, staff development (in-service), curriculum development, evaluation of teachers, and

instructional leadership. Assistant principals are often willing to complete academic, stakeholder-oriented, social, and professional development related tasks. These areas of work are enjoyable for APs (Balikçi, 2020). Not only do these kind of tasks improve the overall morale of APs, they also better prepare assistant principals to eventually assume a principalship role.

It is clear that the role of the AP is nebulous and varies greatly by the needs of the school and the vision of the principal. Most of the duties of the assistant principal can be narrowed down to two categories, managing student needs and instructional leadership. Though most of the responsibilities qualify as managing student needs, APs prefer instructional leadership opportunities, which also better prepare them to eventually assume a principalship and beyond.

Successes and Challenges of School Leaders

The public perception of principals is an “image of the overworked, underpaid principal-bureaucrat tangled in a web of administration, unionized teachers, uninvolved parents, and disinterested students” (Fenwick & Pierce, 2001, p. 25). Public reaction to this image varies from sympathy to resignation. However, the importance of the role of principal, assistant principal, and school leader cannot be ignored – victories and triumphs, as well as trials and tribulations must be considered.

Successes

One of the biggest factors that can improve a school leader’s morale and job performance is increased time on the job (Coelli & Green, 2012). Experience in their job helps principals and assistant principals feel more prepared for the day-to-day tasks. Experienced assistant principals are more prepared to lead curriculum and instruction and

are more able to recognize the importance of understanding students' and adults' needs throughout the school (Barnett et al., 2012).

Principals' job satisfaction improves with more time and experience in their role. Early in the principalship, principals experience only a moderate level of job satisfaction (Eckman, 2004). However, there is a relationship between job satisfaction and time served in the principalship: "the more years served as a high school principal, the higher levels of job satisfaction" (p.383). This suggests that experience and exposure to the responsibilities of the job increases job satisfaction for administrators. There is also opportunity here, as increased levels of job satisfaction may indicate increases of performance for high school administrators.

Another important opportunity for success for school leaders to consider is with student achievement. An increase of job satisfaction and job performance on the part of school leaders also has the potential to improve the academic achievement of students in the school. Supovitz (2010) concluded it best: "Through fostering a climate of instructional collaboration, principals have the greatest impact on learning" (p. 46). This is a huge triumph school leaders can aim to achieve within their schools.

Challenges

There are various challenges that school leaders face with the demands of their job. One of the most significant is role conflict. Eckman (2004) understood role conflict to happen as school leaders attempt to balance their family and home roles with their professional roles. High school administrators in particular experience high levels of role conflict as they attempt to balance all of the responsibilities and obligations of the job

with the responsibilities of their home and personal lives: “the high school principals who chose work first experience the highest levels of role conflict” (p. 383)

Although APs face many of the same challenges as principals, they also have unique challenges as rising leaders. One of the biggest obstacles is starting the new job and undergoing a tough transition to a new role. This is often described by novice assistant principals as “an unpleasant surprise” (Cohen & Schechter, 2019). Barnett et al. (2012) organized the challenges of new assistant principals into four categories: resistance and tension with working with teachers, being compared with predecessors, feeling overwhelmed with the workload demand, and increasing student performance. One part of the difficult transition is the shift from working primarily with students as a teacher to now working primarily with adults as an assistant principal (Barnett et al., 2012).

The workload is also a large undertaking for both school leaders. Assistant principals are often given more managerial rather than leadership tasks (Cranston et al., 2004). The sheer number of tasks an assistant principals face each day, particularly at the beginning of their career, can be daunting. “The multiplicity of tasks leads to the phenomenon of ‘putting out fires’, that is assistant principals are required to carry out more tasks, in order to provide response to ongoing situations beyond their assigned tasks” (Cohen & Schechter, 2019, p.101). It is, therefore, difficult for APs to believe as though they can make progress in their responsibilities if they are constantly solving problems as they arise each day; this creates a significant challenge in attending to the workload.

Furthermore, APs and other school leaders struggle with feeling isolated within their jobs. They move from a group environment with peers to a single job, leaving them with a deep sense of loneliness (Cohen & Schechter, 2019). While there are often large peer groups of teachers within a school, that group diminishes greatly when an individual pursues leadership. The only people who understand the daily triumphs and struggle of the job are the other assistant principals and principals—a very small number within each individual school.

Female School Leaders

When women become school leaders, they have unique assets and encounter distinct challenges. As previously mentioned, one of the critical roles of a school leader is to be an instructional leader within the school. Even though women tend to see instructional leadership as a more challenging role than males (71% vs. 29%), they feel better prepared (65% vs 35%) to conduct this role (Barnett et al., 2012). Because women often spend more time in the classroom before ascending the school leadership ladder (Eckman, 2004; Grogan & Brunner, 2005), they are often more effective instructional leaders because of their plethora of experience when compared to their male counterparts. Reis et al. (1999) confirmed this conclusion by finding that female assistant principal applicants also received significantly higher evaluations than their male counterparts.

Eckman (2004) found that female high school principals are more likely than their male counterparts to be hired in their own district. Grogan and Brunner (2005) reached a parallel conclusion for female superintendents, finding that men are twice as likely as women to be appointed from the outside. These findings suggest that women build

stronger bonds in their positions, which then allows for them to be promoted within the community that they already work. The focus on relationships is crucial for women.

Grogan and Brunner (2005) examined gender and the superintendency. However, this research is comparable and critical to all female school leaders—not just superintendents. Some important findings include that more female (58%) than male (24%) superintendents held undergraduate degrees in education. Women’s academic preparation for the position [of superintendent] is more current: 47% of women earned their highest degree within the past 10 years compared to 36% of men. Female superintendents report more professional development activities in curriculum and instruction. Female superintendents reported interpersonal skills and the ability to maintain organizational relationships and responsiveness to parents and community groups as the most important factors for success in their careers. Overall, Grogan and Brunner (2005) concluded that “women superintendents in this study emerge as community builders, grounded in knowledge of the curriculum and instruction and prepared to stay the course of leading school districts across the country” (p. 50).

Overall, the literature has documented that women are more qualified, have more experience, and foster positive and community-centered cultures. These important characteristics, skills, and qualifications are highly beneficial for a school community, making it more imperative for more women to emerge as educational leaders throughout the country.

Challenges for Women in Leadership

Even though women make up the majority of the teaching force, men make up the majority of school administrators in the U.S. (Bitterman et al., 2013; Matthews & Crow,

2003; Superville, 2017). This leads to an imbalance in the educational system in which women teach in classrooms while men make systemic decisions and lead schools.

Though researchers believe that female and minority leaders are critical in the educational leadership setting, they continue to be underrepresented in school leadership positions (Liang et al., 2018). This is particularly true in the secondary school setting where women make up only 30% of high school administrators (Bitterman et al., 2013), suggesting that female administrators are more accepted at the elementary level but underrepresented at the secondary level (Kruse & Krumm, 2016).

There is a disconnect that inhibits more women to become school leaders. Women reflect the largest percentage of teachers and educational leadership preparation programs but still hold less than one third of high school principal positions (Kruse & Krumm, 2016). Though progress has been steadily made toward more gender equal representation, it is necessary for progress to continue, which makes it essential to examine why this disconnect exists that create a gender imbalance of school leaders. Only by understanding this disconnect can progress continue to be made toward addressing and remedying it.

Women have fewer entry points for becoming a principal, particularly in the high school setting (Glass, 2000). Women tend to enter school leadership in one of three ways: specialist positions, supervisory posts, or elementary school principalships (Shakeshaft, 1987). Referring back to the school leadership paths studied by McGough (2005), this would mean women primarily take a teacher leadership route to a principalship. Women make up 68% of public elementary school principals in the United States. However, that female proportion decreases as the level of school increases: women make up 40% of public middle school principals and 33% of public high school principals (Taie et al.,

2017). Furthermore, the high school principalship is often viewed as the path to the superintendency (Eckman, 2004; Ortiz, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1989; Superville, 2017), so the long reaching consequences of fewer women as secondary school principals is problematic for district wide leadership as well. In fact, only 24.1% of school districts are led by women (Munoz et al., 2014).

One significant barrier limiting women in administration of schools is lack of mentors and networking. Kruse and Krumm (2016) looked into the experiences of four female who were first time high school principals to try to understand their experiences. An important conclusion was that female principals relied on both personal and professional supports to guide them in their transition to a principalship. These supports included professional mentors, parents, co-workers, friends, principals and superintendents. However, the professional mentors were often male, which suggested that “male gatekeepers encouraged these participants to continue their educations, take the principal’s test, and apply for the positions” (p. 34). This suggests that there would be more reliance on female professional mentors if there were more female assistant principals, principals, and superintendents for emerging leaders to rely on and look to for guidance.

Another extenuating factor that could be contributing to the gender imbalance is the struggle for maintaining work life balance. Although all principals may struggle with managing the demands of their job and the responsibilities of their home (Eckman, 2004), female principals have reported the struggles of balancing all of their responsibilities twice as often as male principals (Kochran et al., 2000). Eckman (2004) found that male and female high school principals significantly differed in career mobility based on their

marital status. Female principals were less likely to be married. Furthermore, “only 24% of the female high school principals had children at home, whereas 59% of the male high school principals had children at home. These data suggest that women with children at home are not applying for the high school principalship or they are not being hired” (p. 377). It is easy to conclude that women are less likely to have children in their home when they assume a high school principalship because of the significant challenge of finding a balance between the responsibilities of work and the obligations of their personal lives.

Part of the hardship in balancing personal and professional responsibilities for females aspiring to enter school leadership is the second shift (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). This concept refers to the fact that in heterosexual households in which both parents work full time, the bulk of housework and childcare is the responsibility of the woman in the home. This makes it more challenging for women to pursue careers that keep them out of the home for longer hours or more days. This highlights a significant problem when considering why women may not pursue school leadership until they are more experience within their career and their children are grown and out of the home; as such gender in leadership has unique considerations because of its social role and the impact the social norms have on the position.

Social Role Theory

Social Role theory is a dominant theory related to the impact of gender on the roles and expectations for individuals. Social Role theory “postulates that social perceivers’ beliefs about social groups in their society derive from their experiences with group members in their typical social roles” (Koenig & Eagly, 2014, pp. 371-372). When

people have experiences with individuals in different social roles, they begin to associate the characteristics they encounter with the role in society. For example, when women are observed as teachers more often than men, women are perceived as having traits essential to caring for children, like warmth and nurturing. Alternatively, when men are more observed as being school administrators, men are perceived as having traits more associated with leadership, like ambition and confidence (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). These social roles are then set an early age as the majority of people in a community learn about these roles as they undergo their educational experiences. As they pursue educational leadership, women have the added challenge of working against male stereotypes in school leadership positions.

Summary

Principals, assistant principals, and superintendents face a variety of challenges including role conflict, tough transitions, enormous workload, and feelings of isolation. However, the more time they have on the job, the more likely they are to be satisfied and effective within their roles. Even though women have more experience and have more formal and recent schooling in education, they continue to face a unique set of challenges including underrepresentation, lack of effective and relatable mentors, and maintenance of work life balance. However, their high qualifications, focus on relationships, and strong community are positive contributions women add to any school leadership team. Finally, the use of Social Role theory may serve to better understand women's experiences of the AP role and its demands.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, expectations, and aspirations of women who are currently secondary assistant principals compared to women who aspire to the role. A qualitative methodology using a comparative case study design was used with Social Role theory as the theoretical framework. This chapter focuses on the methods to support these research questions using the following chapter layout: (a) research questions, (b) research designs, (c) school district characteristics, (d) data sources, (e) data collection, (f) data analysis, (g) researcher experience and stance, and (h) summary.

Research Questions

Two research questions were designed to support the purpose of this study. The questions are:

Research Question 1: What are female leaders' and aspiring female leaders' perceptions and expectations of the assistant principal?

Research Question 2: How do female leaders and aspiring female leaders understand the pathway to the assistant principal role?

Research Design

This qualitative study uses a comparative case study design. A case study is defined as “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2018, p.15). My goal is gain an in-depth understanding of the expectations of the AP role at the secondary level. I also aim to understand the pathway to the secondary AP position. However,

because I also aim to understand the motivations, expectations, and aspirations of women who are working to attain a leadership position, it is important to use two cases in order to “make some grand comparisons rather than to increase understanding of the individual cases” (Stake, 2006, p.83). The lived experiences of the current and aspiring female APs shaped this research, and this study provided an important opportunity to explore in-depth thoughts and deliberations of these women.

School District Characteristics

The participants of this study are employed at middle and high schools in a large school district in the western United States. These middle and high schools vary in the size of the student body, social economic makeup, and location. The middle schools serve Grades 6-8 and each high school serves Grades 9-12. The schools also do not have a uniform makeup of the administrative team. Though all schools have a principal and at least one assistant principal and dean of students, the number of assistant principals and deans of students vary based upon the size and demographic of the school. The school district educates approximately 64,000 students across 96 schools. It is the second biggest school district in the state.

Data Sources

Participants

In the comparative case study design, the response of the two groups were closely examined and compared. The first group is eight females who are current, secondary APs. Four are in middle school settings, and four are high school APs. Participants in the assistant principal group were given the opportunity to reflect upon the path they took to earn an assistant principal position, to discuss their experiences within the position, and

to reflect about their future career goals. This information was compared with the other group who have the credentials to become school administrators but do not yet hold an assistant principal position. The second group of participants are aspiring female educational leaders—three classroom teachers, one school data coach, two school site learning facilitators, and two high school deans of students. These participants also reflected upon their experiences so far, identified the expectations they have for an assistant principal role, and shared some of the goals they hope to achieve as potential school administrators.

Participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling. The participants are selected because their background indicates that they will provide insight into the phenomenon being investigated due to their position or experience (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). For the group of current administrators, I explored the school district website to identify all female secondary assistant principals within the school district. The assistant principals had be working in a high school or middle school to meet the criteria. I contacted the female APs via email to request an interview.

Though the schools they work at vary, all participants in this group hold the same position of assistant principal. Four participants are middle school assistant principals, and four are high school assistant principals. Their experience ranges from four years in an AP role to 20 years in the role. One participant was previously an elementary assistant principal for a few years. Seven of the participants have children, ranging from age three to adult.

For the group of women who hold an administrative credential but are not

currently administrators, purposive sampling was also used. Participants are recent graduates of a master's degree program with the pseudonym, Want to Lead. The participants earned an administrative credential and are actively seeking administrative leadership positions within the school district. After contacting the professor who oversees the program, I received a list of female recent graduates. I cross referenced that list with employees of the school district to determine which women were not in assistant principal roles. Once I had a list of eligible interview candidates, I contacted via email to request an interview.

The job titles of these women vary greatly, though all women indicated a goal to eventually become an assistant principal. Three are classroom teachers, one is a school data coach, two are school site learning facilitators, and two are high school deans of students. Their years of employment in education ranges from five years to 32 years. Four of these women have children, ranging from age three to adult.

Human Resources (HR) Data

Data from the school district HR department was also collected and assessed. Assistant principal job descriptions, hiring statistics, hiring policies and procedures for administrators, and salary scales were aggregated and closely analyzed.

The job descriptions were compared with the experiences of current APs and the expectations of aspiring APs. The hiring policies and procedures were used to compare and contrast the experiences of the APs and those aspiring to the role as they went through the process of obtaining their position.

The hiring statistics presented the gender distribution of elementary, middle, and high school administrators in this chosen district. The salary scales provided information

about how assistant principals are paid at the different levels of schools and with different educational experiences and backgrounds.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred under the auspices of the University of Nevada, Reno's Institutional Review Board (IRB), alongside approval by the district's Director of Research and Evaluation. After gaining approval, results from the semi-structured interviews served as the main data source for this study. Semi-structured interviews allowed me as the researcher to study the verbal and nonverbal responses of the participants and make any adjustments or ask questions beyond the scope of written questions as appropriate (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Each of the interviews were conducted outside of contract hours via Zoom. Questions were prepared ahead of time (Appendix A), but deviation from the questions was necessary to tease out specific information. Each interview was no longer than an hour to attend to participants' busy schedules. The interviews were recorded via Zoom and transcribed via Otter. The transcriptions were uploaded into NVivo for further data analysis and processing.

Other data sources are existing data from the district's Human Resources Department. The data from the semi-structured interviews was triangulated with human resources data from the school district. The researcher reviewed the district website for publicly available documents. The administrative salary schedule and the hiring policies and procedures for administrators were available on the school district's website. The professional growth systems coordinator was contacted for the other documentation, including assistant principal job descriptions and hiring statistics for secondary assistant

principal jobs. Yin (2018) affirms that it is crucial for case study research to include multiple sources of evidence because the goal is to complete an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon in its real-world context. These supportive sources will provide more information and context for the research and the human resources data will be triangulated with the data from the semi-structured interviews in order to get a complete picture of the assistant principal position.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began with reading and reviewing the transcriptions and notes from each interview. The first step condensed each interview transcript to better manage the data. To reduce the length, the transcript was reduced to the text of each question response unnecessary repetitions were deleted from the participant answers (e.g., a story that is told twice in an interview). Words that did not contribute to the clarity of the response, such as *um* or *like* were also removed. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) emphasize that though condensing each interview is critical, “researchers should never change or add language to clarify what they think a participant meant to say or how they think the participant would have said something more concisely” (p. 118). The participants’ answers remained unchanged.

Prior to coding, the transcripts were reviewed several times in order for the researcher to become familiar with the data. Key words were extracted from each interview with specific references to each of the research questions. As key words and ideas emerged, specific challenges faced by assistant principals or those aspiring to the role in the past or present were sought and analyzed. Themes regarding the path, challenges, and/or future endeavors, ideally specific job titles the assistant principals

hope to obtain in the future were also identified. Though there were many similarities in the experiences of the female participants, differences were also present and helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of the overall experiences. Therefore, several themes were identified in response to each research question.

Values coding was utilized to compile the data. Values coding notes when the participant references attitudes, values, and/or beliefs and then the researcher is able to infer and interpret it from the data (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). This was useful in developing an in-depth understanding of the participants' attitudes, values, and beliefs about their past, present, and futures experiences with their jobs as a way to understand what challenges women face in educational leadership roles. Values coding is appropriate for studies that explore participants' cultural values, identity, and experiences (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018), all of which support the purpose of this study.

Researcher Background

I am a female researcher and a secondary teacher who has worked with a variety of diverse administrators during my career. Over the last 10 years, I have worked for one female principal, five female assistant principals, and two female superintendents in both middle and high school settings. I am also interested in pursuing an educational leadership path in the future and want to know the expectations of this role that may be ahead of me. I believe I am personally and professionally qualified to conduct this research to gain insight and compare the real life experiences of this critical role to the beliefs about the expectations from aspiring leaders.

Summary

This research adds to the body of work that has focused on assistant principals. Most educational research focuses on principals and superintendents (Barnett et al., 2012; Cohen & Schechter, 2019), which ignores the role of the assistant principal. Yet, this role is fundamental to both the performance of a school and the pathway to further school leadership (McGough, 2003). Therefore, this study may address some of the struggles women have as they ascend the leadership pathways within education. A mere understanding of gender disproportionalities in educational leadership between females and males is insufficient (Bitterman et al., 2013; ED, 2004; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Superville, 2017). It is critical to better understand *why* such a discrepancy exists within this leadership role.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The overall purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, expectations, and aspirations of women who are currently secondary assistant principals compared to women who aspire to the role. For the purpose of this study, two research questions (RQ) guided this work:

RQ1. What are female leaders' and aspiring female leaders' perceptions and expectations of the assistant principal?

RQ2. How do female leaders and aspiring female leaders understand the pathway to the assistant principal role?

These research questions were chosen as a way to deeply understand each research group and then to compare the data and information from one group to the findings from the other. These questions help guide understanding of the important elements of this research as it pertains to the two different groups of participants and the overall female experience in educational leadership.

Chapter Four is comprised of four sections. The first section identifies and examines the gender distribution of people in administrative roles within the school district that the participants are employed. The next two sections present the results of the interviews as they pertain to each of the two research questions. For each research question, several themes that emerged from the interviews are shared. The themes are supported with evidence from the interview data from both groups, assistant principals and aspiring school leaders. Their experiences are compared as appropriate within each of the themes. When appropriate, the HR data is used to contextualize the findings from

the interview data. The final section shows the contrasting lens between the AP and aspiring groups.

Table 1 displays the number of female and male deans of students, APs, and principals at the elementary, middle, high school, and nontraditional schools within the school district. The nontraditional schools are the K-8, K-12, and adult education programs.

Table 1

Gender Distribution of School District Administrators

Elementary School (K-5) Administrators		
	Number	Percentage
Female Principals	40	66%
Male Principals	21	34%
Female Assistant Principals	12	100%
Male Assistant Principals	0	0%
Female Deans of Students	13	81%
Male Deans of Students	3	19%
Middle School (6-8) Administrators		
Female Principals	9	56%
Male Principals	7	44%
Female Assistant Principals	13	72%
Male Assistant Principals	5	28%
Female Deans of Students	7	50%

Male Deans of Students	7	50%
High School (9-12) Administrators		
Female Principals	7	58%
Male Principals	5	42%
Female Assistant Principals	21	58%
Male Assistant Principals	15	42%
Female Deans of Students	8	53%
Male Deans of Students	7	47%
Nontraditional School (K-8, K-12, and Adult) School Administrators		
Female Principals	1	20%
Male Principals	4	80%
Female Assistant Principals	4	100%
Male Assistant Principals	0	0%
Female Deans of Students	4	80%
Male Deans of Students	1	20%

Note. Retrieved through district HR office.

According to Table 1, females represent the majority of assistant principals and principals at most levels within this particular school district. However, the percentage of females in the principal and assistant principal role decreases from the elementary to the secondary level. Female principals decrease from 66% in elementary school to 56% in middle school and 58% in high school. Female principals make up only 20% of the principals at nontraditional schools. Females make up 100% of elementary school APs,

down to 72% of middle school APs and their lowest percentage is 58% of high school APs. They also account for 100% of the APs in nontraditional school settings.

Description of Participants in Each Case

The participants in the AP case are eight current APs in the secondary setting. Four of the participants are middle school APs and the other four are high school APs. Their years of experience in the AP position ranges from four to 20 years. Their employment within the field of education ranges from 16 to 30 years. Collectively these women have been elementary, middle, and high school teachers, leadership advisors, high school sports team coaches, athletic directors, department leaders, and deans of students. They have led district wide and school site professional developments, worked on district committees, mentored novice teachers, and served on school accreditation teams. As APs, they have supervised curriculum, buildings and grounds, athletics, school safety, schoolwide assessments, and the creation of the master schedule. They serve on student learning objective (SLO) committees and behavior committees on their school sites. They have vast and diverse experiences. Throughout Chapters Four and Five, they are identified as AP and numbered in the order they were interviewed. For example, the first interview is AP1 and the last interview is AP8.

The aspiring AP case is made up of eight women who have the necessary leadership credential to assume an AP position and are actively pursuing the role. Of these participants, three are classroom teachers, one is a school data coach, two are school site learning facilitators, and two are high school deans of students. These women have experience as elementary, middle, and high school teachers. Their previous positions include leadership advisor, yearbook advisor, charter school dean of students,

grant program coordinator, learning specialist, English Language Development (ELD) site facilitator, Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) Coordinator, charter school principal, and professional learning coordinator. They serve on several committees within their schools, including accreditation, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and Positive Behavior Interventions Systems (PBIS). Their employment in education ranges from five to 32 years. Throughout Chapters Four and Five, they are identified as ASPIRING and labeled in the order in which they were interviewed. For example, the first interview is labeled ASPIRING1 and the last person interviewed is labeled ASPIRING8.

RQ1: Perceptions of the Assistant Principal Role and Expectations

Throughout the country, the role of the AP is largely dependent on the vision of the principal and the structure of the school (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Within the participants' school district, the middle and high schools have multiple administrators who share the various duties and responsibilities, including student attendance, discipline, maintenance of building and grounds, MTSS, PBIS, athletics, assessment etc. The job description of the middle school AP position for the school district states: "Under direction of the principal, serves as assistant instructional leader and assistant administrative officer of a middle school. Incumbent performs related work as required." The high school AP job description is, however, much more detailed:

Under direction of the principal, serves as an instructional leader and assistant administrative officer of a secondary school. As part of a leadership team, is responsible for site progress toward achieving the school's mission, goals, and plans. Incumbent provides management of site programs, accountability

directives, student discipline, and facilities. Incumbent acts as liaison to parents, community, and other district groups. Monitors and assists with student progress, evaluated and ensures high-quality staff performance, and works with parents and the community to ensure every student graduates ready for college and/or a highly-skilled career. Incumbent performs related work as required.

Within the participants' schools, administrators are assigned to specific areas of responsibility. AP8 discussed the division of roles within the high school setting:

One of the reasons that I did want to go back into high school is I love the compartmentalization. In elementary, whether you're a principal or an assistant principal, or even a dean, you're doing everything. Whereas in high school, I'm over discipline and activities. My job gets to be very specialized, and I get to just focus on one or two things and do it well.

The middle schools within this district have smaller administrative staffs, with only one or two assistant principals, compared to three or four in the high school settings. The responsibilities are shared among the members of the administrative team, but it is not as specialized. AP6 listed her responsibilities within her middle school as supervising the special education (SpEd) department, tracking staff and student attendance, overseeing student discipline, coordinating schoolwide assessments, evaluating teachers and classified staff, and finding sub and prep period coverage.

Though all of the participants had varying roles and responsibilities, there were many shared experiences they discussed about the relationships they build with students and staff, handling changing policies and transitioning district level management, managing how their school day runs, and the time they must dedicate to the job.

Staff Relationships

One role of an assistant principal is working with and managing the staff of a school. This includes teachers, office staff, aides, the custodial team, etc. Though it is a transition from working primarily with children as a teacher, this change has positive and negative aspects. According to AP4, “managing human capital is by far the hardest thing. I think that would be [with] any leadership role.” However, this same assistant principal pointed out that when she left the school for a semester to pursue an interim principalship, she struggled with being away from the support system she had built:

I really missed the teams that I had. I had not really recognized the bonds, the connection, the depth of my relationships with the adults. As much as some might drive me crazy at times because we just think differently, I value them so much.

One middle school assistant principal (AP1) pointed out that it is crucial to be intentional in building relationships and establishing a strong positive rapport with staff. AP1 explained, “It’s also hard to build trust with your staff. That perspective of you are the boss, or the evaluator, and trying to be real transparent and having an open door and wanting to just be here as a support.” Several APs talked about the rewards of positive relationships with teachers. According to AP5, “When I know I can do something that’s going to be helpful or that is going to be beneficial to them and having them say thank you or I appreciate you listening.”

However, the relationships are not always positive. There is another side to being in charge of staff and sometimes having to clarify the jobs and responsibilities of a teacher. AP6 discussed the negative side of staff relationships and pointed out that she struggled this year to keep her staff motivated and engaged:

Both myself and my principal this year have been having to do a lot of reminders of just basic job duties, like you got to get your grades in on time. And you need to call in by a certain time. You can't fail a kid if you haven't called the parents. Just kind of a lot of what their basic professional responsibilities are. We're constantly having to remind them this year.

Such challenges can make it difficult for school community members to find harmony.

One assistant principal (AP2) states that there is often misunderstanding between administrators and teachers in terms of the different responsibilities APs and other school administrators have. "Sometimes the teachers' expectation of us is not really realizing what we do." The expectations and responsibilities of an AP are unclear to teachers.

It is not just APs who spoke to the importance of the relationship between staff and the administrative team. The aspiring leaders also indicated aspirations and concerns for the transition to managing adults in a leadership role. ASPIRING1, who is currently a classroom teacher explained "the most challenging part is managing the adults. I think that's because it's hard to handle adults who have really different opinions about topics that they're passionate about."

The concern, however, is not just adults working with other adults. ASPIRING8 is out of the classroom and already working with teachers, and she has found that not all teachers value students. She points out, "if I could change some of teachers' minds about kids, I would do that in a heartbeat." On the other hand, there are positive beliefs and hope about working with adults are also present. ASPIRING6 praised the current body of leadership beliefs that shapes how leaders engage with teachers: "I like that aspect of

leadership, that new leadership—not being the boss, but being the one who provides opportunities for people to lead and make better decisions that support everybody.”

Instructional Leader

As staff relationships are demanded in the role of school leaders—these relationships are instrumental in serving as an instructional leader. The middle school AP job description lists one of the exemplary duties/responsibilities as, “Regularly assess the teaching methods and strategies being used and ensures that they are appropriate, varied, and effective.” The high school description notes the responsibility as “evaluates staff for continuous improvement.” Becoming an instructional leader and observing teachers was mentioned as being one of the harder transitions to the AP role. AP1 noted that “It was hard to prepare yourself for an assistant principal job because you’re an instructional leader. Now that was a big shift from discipline to now instructional leader.” An assistant principal position was the first opportunity participants had to serve as an instructional leader, and they indicated it was difficult to prepare for.

Many participants in this study primarily spent classrooms to see instruction when they were evaluating their teachers. One middle school assistant principal (AP6) identified classroom observations as her favorite part of the job:

I love being in classrooms. I love seeing kids learn. I love having my post observation meetings with teachers and being able to give them tips and ideas and kind of see their like I call it light bulb moments. I love to see those light bulb moments with the teachers, but also with the kids.

AP2 echoed this same sentiment within her high school and also enjoys being able to use her background in coaching to help teachers improve instruction. “The positive is taking my coaching experience and applying it to teachers and working with them.”

However, some expressed frustration that they could not be in classrooms more. AP1 expressed frustration about sometimes having to prioritize other tasks as the day goes on: “When you think of what the ultimate goal is, it is to be in classrooms and provide feedback and do walkthroughs. For our admin team, that does not always take priority unless you do it at the beginning [of the day].” Unfortunately, though the role of instructional leaders is important and enjoyable for many assistant principals, it is often underutilized because of the other tasks that emerge throughout the day.

Aspiring educational leaders echoed the importance and value of the instructional leadership. One learning facilitator (ASPIRING5) had already begun to branch out and observe other teachers within her school. She stated, “When you’re in your own classroom, doing what you do, you might be the best teacher in the world, but there’s so much you learn from seeing other people. I think that was really a positive for me.” She stated such experiences will be helpful for her as she continues to pursue instructional leader practices and prepares to eventually become a classroom evaluator of teachers and staff.

ASPIRING8 plans to interview for AP positions for next school year and expressed concern over being an effective instructional leader and evaluator once she becomes an AP:

I’ll be an evaluator next year. Am I going to be evaluating something like science, where I feel very strong because I know the standards? Are they going to put me

in English? What do you want me to evaluate? But keeping in mind that it doesn't matter what area you're put in. Good teaching is good teaching.

It is clear that, though the instructional leader role is critical to the assistant principal position, it is difficult and APs often grow in this responsibility with hands on experience in an instructional leader or teacher evaluator role. Both APs and aspiring leaders spoke to the importance of the role but also expressed how difficult of a transition it can be for novice APs.

Mentorship

Mentoring developing leaders is one of the most critical components of a leadership position (Cohen & Schechter, 2019). Several of the current assistant principals talked about not only the importance of being an instructional leader for teachers but also being a mentor for developing leaders within their building. AP8 indicated finding a great deal of satisfaction in mentoring rising leaders: "I love being able to raise other leaders and just build capacity in my teachers, my deans, even office staff. I love being able to just build a team collaboration. [It] is my strength." AP7 also spoke about her role as a mentor for both teachers and other staff members within the building: "I really try to be there for people and mentor others or be accessible and help them."

Student Relationships

Though administrators do not teach in classrooms each day, students are still at the foundation of their work, and they work to intentionally build positive relationships with students. AP5 noted that within her high school, "Ultimately, we're here for students, so when you see students succeed—when they graduate or when they pass a class or when you find a way that's going to help them in whatever their goals and

dreams are.” This was one of many mentions of the value of those relationships. In particular, administrators noted how impactful it was to see students accomplish their goals. AP2 believed that “Watching some kids that really struggled the four years walk across the stage is probably the most rewarding for us.”

Many APs appreciated the small moments and connections with kids. AP3’s connections with her middle school students are a reminder of “why I got in it in the first place.” Another middle school assistant principal (AP4) pointed out that impactful moments with students may be rare, but they mean a great deal: “While I cannot pinpoint on the spot maybe the biggest...I can tell you that even though they’re few and far between, when you have moments when students get it.”

Positive relationships also motivate many of the aspiring leaders to continue to pursue leadership and impact more students. One current teacher, ASPIRING2, who had some administrative experience in the past, talked about the greater number of student connections administrators are able to make:

I feel like I still make time to be with the kids and [form] relationships and everything else. Sometimes it’s nice because you actually have a larger sample size of your school to make those connections with and to follow them through from when they start to when they leave.

Another aspiring leader (ASPIRING7) echoed this sentiment in regards to the implementation of programs to develop ideas that administrators are able to make and how that impacts students:

If we’re implementing stuff at the school site that benefitting kids, you’re gonna see higher graduation rates, higher engagement in the classroom. And I think for

me, that's the best thing because you're seeing kids being involved in their education and teachers being excited to be at work, excited to help their kids.

It is clear that the relationships with students are not just fundamental to the role of teaching. They are also critical to administrators. Student well-being is a celebration for all members of the school community.

Behavior and Discipline

As leaders build relationships with students, discipline remains a primary responsibility of school administrator. The middle school job description does not mention discipline. However, it does list “sets high expectations for students, staff, parents, and self” and “demonstrate an understanding of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) as it relates to student success including familiarity with Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS)” as exemplary duties of candidates for the role. The high school job description explicitly lists discipline as an exemplary duty and responsibility regarding students: “manages discipline issues, including positive behavior supports, conflict resolution, detention, in-house/at home suspensions, expulsions.”

The participants of this study work in schools in which one AP typically oversees discipline. However, sometimes the demand for discipline is too great for one administrator. AP4 discussed that at her middle school “sometimes it's all hands on deck and we're all doing discipline all the time.”

One of the high school assistant principal participants (AP8) is in charge of discipline within her school. She described her responsibilities as:

Overseeing our SRO (Student Relations Office) office—that is our discipline office—just overseeing the safety of our school, the safety of our campus, making

sure that our deans, which we have two amazing deans...but just making sure that they are following up on all the referrals.

She followed up with description of difficult discipline has been during the pandemic and problems associated with the influence of social media: “I don’t know if you’ve heard that across the nation, there’s just been a lot of student behavior.” Because of this increase in student negative behaviors, her school had to strongly enforce some behavior policies:

We had to implement some really strong procedures and discipline that they hadn’t really had to do before. But to get our kids to understand this is what we’re expecting, it just took a lot of consistency and a lot of discipline, which is hard.

You don’t want to have to suspend or consequence kids or do those things, but we were just at a point where we had to.

This shift in discipline practices also occurred at the middle schools. Two middle school APs discussed the challenges they have faced since returning to school full time during the pandemic. AP3 discussed behavior: “The most challenging part [of this year] has been mostly just trying to keep the kids sane, keeping their masks on their faces. A lot of the TikTok nonsense...just behavior.” Her experiences were supported by an AP6 at another middle school within the district: “We need help in the schools, the behaviors are out of control. And the support is not there.”

The aspiring school leaders indicated an understanding that working with students and their behavior was inevitably going to be a major part of the job. ASPIRING5 said “It’s behavior. It’s chasing down kids. It’s calling parents.” ASPIRING8, who currently works with student discipline, expressed a great deal of satisfaction within the discipline

realm. She named discipline—specifically in regards to bullying—as one of the most positive parts of her job:

Learning how to do a bullying investigation from start to finish. Really putting all those pieces together has been very positive. I mean, they're not fun to do, but doing it from start to finish and really getting into the meat of it and figuring out is this bullying? Is this not bullying? What is this? And how do we help the child if it is bullying? Or even if it isn't? What supports can we put into place? That's been rewarding.

One middle school assistant principal (AP4) spoke about her thoughts on female administrators and their role as disciplinarians: “When you get those type of female admin...I can't prove this...it is total gut data. I think kids respond better to discipline from females, and I don't know why.” Though she was the only assistant principal to share this belief, she believed it was important based on her years of experience working with both male and female administrators.

Change and Transitions

Another responsibility of school administrations is to support students and staff as their schools and district undergo changes in leadership and policy. However, administrators admit to also having a difficult time undergoing those transitions.

AP2 spoke about the challenge of working for two different principals. Each principal had a different leadership style, so it took time for her to meet the expectations of the new principal after the transition. This was further complicated by different APs making up the rest of the administrative team within the school:

Since I've been here so long, I've had transitions of leadership: APs and principals. I've [worked for] two principals that are totally different. One was a micromanager and one is, "Hey, just get your stuff done". That's been kind of different.

Another high school assistant principal (AP5) discussed the hardships of transitioning a staff and school because of a zoning change that drastically altered the student population of the school.

This year was a huge challenge. We've changed our demographic significantly, and that in and of itself was an unknown that we knew was going to be a big, big, big impact, but we didn't really know how big until it happened.

She continued by pointing out how the changes in student body could impact the teachers and staff of the school. "Staff changes—people retiring, people choose to leave, people wanting different positions. Nobody is guaranteed anything. It could be a completely different school in a year or two."

Even beyond the changes within a school, changes within a school district can be difficult. The administrative team often bridges the communication between the school district and their individual school staff and site. School district officials and leaders rely on communication with the administrative team. The team is in charge of communicating with teachers and staff. Significant leadership changes within the school district can have a massive impact on admin teams and schools. One of the middle school assistant principals (AP6) spoke about her wariness of the changes to come at the school district level:

I think there's a lot of unknowns right now with the superintendent retiring, the deputy superintendent retiring. Our budget is not looking good because there's been several lawsuits. All of the bargaining units, like the unions, are very unhappy. And I think just as a whole, we're facing major staffing shortages because of where the world is at right now. I think that will continue to be, and that's another unknown.

AP5 also expressed concern about what the future holds for the school district in the next several years:

I think we've been living in the unknown for so long. Even down to our own district. We have a whole [new] administration coming in as far as a superintendent and in some other smaller roles. That can really impact how schools run and what initiatives they want to bring on. We're sort of always at the mercy of decisions made for us, and without our input, and then having to make them happen.

Although most aspiring leaders did not mention the navigation of change and transition within their interviews, one dean of students (ASPIRING7) spoke about how often district policies change and how that can be a challenge for many school leaders. "The changing policies and the changing philosophies. It's never consistent, so finding that middle ground of...you're never going to please everybody, but sometimes you have to do what you have to do."

Management of the School Day

School administrators have a plethora of responsibilities. They are not only in charge of specific duties within their schools (attendance, athletics, assessment, etc.), but

they must also evaluate teachers and discipline students. Ten of the 16 participants spoke about how difficult it is for assistant principals to manage their days because there is so much going on within a school during school hours.

Many assistant principals spoke about how difficult it is to get tasks completed during the school day. AP1, a middle school assistant principal, noted, "I'll have a task list but oftentimes I can't get to it because my day...just happens TO me. Day to day a lot of it is...I don't want to say putting out fires. You have to be present and available." Her experience was shared by AP4, another middle school assistant principal, who pointed out, "Making plans is almost a joke. It doesn't mean you don't try it, but it's kind of a joke. I'm just walking through the door with my shields, not sure what's going to get thrown at me."

High school assistant principals struggle with the same chaos in their days. AP2 noted, "All my plans go out the window because of the need that's there right now. You have to be semi-flexible." Her experiences were supported by AP5: "It is chaotic. You can't really have a plan. I mean, you can, but it's very rare that you're going to achieve even half of that plan. Something always becomes more important along the way."

Many administrators discussed how challenging it was to feel as though they are not able to complete all of their tasks during the school day. AP7 mentions, "You're so into whatever's happening on that day, and you have to prioritize the important things of what has to get done. A lot is accepting that I'm not going to get my list done." AP5 really struggles with the amount of interruptions that arise during the school day: "If you're a planner, you're a Type A, or somebody that is really hard on yourself, you start to really internalize that a lot."

The aspiring leaders are aware of the struggles of dealing with issues as they arise and having to push aside everything else. ASPIRING2 pulled from her previous administrative experience to say:

I think that day to day, you never know. It ends up looking like whatever the school needs that day and you being able to prioritize what is something you need to take care of versus something somebody else can take care of. What is a right now problem versus a that can be tomorrow problem?

Two aspiring leaders mentioned the idea of putting out fires throughout the day:

“Inboxing, putting out fires, looking at what needs to happen and prioritizing”

(ASPIRING3). She is supported by another aspiring leader with previous administrative experience: “It’s obviously dousing fires, running around putting fires out is the day-to-day thing” (ASPIRING6).

Lack of Time

Because assistant principals are pulled in so many different directions throughout the school day, they spend a great deal of time outside of school hours working in order to complete all of their tasks. In fact, seven of the eight assistant principals identified time as one of the biggest challenges of their jobs.

AP1 spoke to the amount of time she spends on her work each day. “I’m putting in 12 to 14 hour days because it’s just so heavy. It’s timing. You’ve got to get these calls done...tomorrow is too late.” AP2 had a similar experience with time and found she had to work later or on the weekends:

Sometimes you have to stay later and finish whatever if you didn’t get it done that day. Sometimes you come in on weekends to get caught up or you take it home

with you and get caught up. I usually am one of the last ones to leave at five o'clock. I'm always here.

AP7 expressed that she is always in search of more time and wishing there were more hours in the day for her to complete her work to the best of her abilities:

Time. I cannot leave a day without think I need more hours to be the best I can be and get done everything I need to. I end up doing work at home or on weekends, or I stay late. I come in [early] to get what I need to get done.

Several APs routinely take work home. They are able to get more tasks completed outside of school hours. AP4 states, "You bring it all home. Mine is in my backpack. I work Sundays. You figure it out." AP5 was overwhelmed with the amount of time she spent working, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Through the pandemic, especially, I felt like we were never not working. If we were not working, we were away but we had to be ready to get on a meeting, figure out how we're going to go hybrid, or wait for the district to make a decision.

The sheer volume of hours APs spend at work impacts their personal and home lives. AP3 noted that the hours she worked has previously taken a toll on prioritizing taking care of herself:

In terms of the job itself, I think the most challenging part over the past four years is just finding enough time to make sure that I'm taking care of myself, too.

There's a lot of time—weekends and late nights—just trying to prepare for things. AP6 had to consider the time requirements of an administrative job with the needs of her family. "Right now I'm gonna stay put because it's what works for me and my family.

My husband is also an administrator. The schedule of secondary...it'd be very hard if we were both doing principal positions.”

Two of the aspiring leaders also expressed concern about the time on the job. They were wary of how much time they will spend working once they become APs. ASPIRING6 discussed the challenge of leaving something incomplete until the next day in order to prioritize oneself and personal relationships:

I think knowing when to stop, knowing when to go home, and knowing when not to look at your email or your phone. I think the most challenging is to be a spouse, to be a parent, to be a friend, to be somebody's daughter.

ASPIRING8 shared that concern and pointed to the current assistant principals at her school as models. She worries she will face the same struggle finding balance: “We have two admin that are the first ones there and they're the last ones to leave. And when I'm talking first ones, they're there at five o'clock, and they don't leave until seven.”

Motherhood

Given that the assistant principal position takes so much time, it can be difficult to find work-life balance, especially when it comes to being a mom and having children at home. AP1 decided to pursue administration after her children were older and more independent: “I've often thought about having kids younger in this role, and I would have missed out too much. I would have not become an administrator when my kids were young.” Alternatively, AP5 has young children and deals with balancing the pull of her job as an administrator and her job as a mom:

As a mom of young children with a husband that's also in education, I think that personally affects how I do my job. I don't have the luxury or the time to stay

later or come in early because I'm a mom first. I have to manage that. [It] sometimes feels unfair to my coworkers who can stay late and are at a different point in their life.

It is evident that both of these mothers felt as though they had to choose between being a parent and being an assistant principal because both duties have high demands and are time consuming.

One high school assistant principal, AP7, struggled with this balance early on in her career, but is still learning many years later:

I ended up getting a divorce. Being a single mom, working a lot of nights and a lot of weekends. But getting a divorce and really trying to learn that balance of work and home is still difficult for me all these years later.

Being an assistant principal has provided unique challenges to several mothers, often putting them in a position of having to choose between career and motherhood.

The aspiring leaders also expressed concern about lack of time and parent responsibility. Two shared concern about not having opportunities available to them because of their age and choice of whether or not they pursue motherhood. ASPIRING2 asked herself, "I wonder from time to time, especially because of my age, you know are they afraid I'm going to have kids? Are they afraid I'm going to have a family?"

ASPIRING4, on the other hand, has children but worries about the stigma associated with being a mom and applying for such a time-consuming position: "Luckily, I am done having kids, so I wouldn't have that challenge. A younger woman sometimes [may be seen as] she might be having a baby because she's in her early 30s." Finally, ASPIRING3

worries about the schedule and time commitment and how that may change the time she has to spend with her children.

I now have two young kids who I share time off [with]. That's another thing about becoming an AP. A bunch of those positions are in middle school when I have little kids. I can't leave them at 6:30 in the morning every other week. Where am I going to put them?

RQ2: The Pathway to AP

McGough (2003) identified four pathways to becoming a principal. However, the most common pathway that McGough's participants pursued was identified as the classic route, which included moving from classroom teacher to assistant principal and then eventually assuming a principalship role. Both the middle and high school AP job descriptions list the same requirements for the job: a master's degree in school administration or related field, five years teaching experience with two concurrent years of site/district/educational leadership in the last five years, and satisfactory evaluations in the last five years. For all of the assistant principal participants in this study, there was one more step between being a classroom teacher and an assistant principal—the role of dean of students. Two of the aspirational leaders are currently in the dean of students role in a high school. Three of the aspirational leaders chose to pursue a teacher leadership role after leaving the classroom, rather than a dean of students position.

Call to Action

All 16 participants spoke about a call to action—something that inspired them to want to begin the journey to school leadership. While some administrators had a plan of becoming an AP from the beginning of their careers, others felt they needed something

more after teaching for several years. Many were inspired and encouraged by administrators and peers to pursue an administrative career. A couple found success in leadership roles and wanted to build upon that foundation.

Some planned to become a school administrator before they began their teaching career. AP5 noted she knew she wanted to pursue administration “prior to my career, starting as a student in the college of ed that I had sort of planned to continue and get my masters in administration so that in my future career I had options.” ASPIRING4 stated an early calling to go into school administration:

I always knew I wanted to be admin just because I knew I wanted to grow in my career. I love working with students, and I feel like I have this duty and this calling in my heart that I am supposed to do something and make a difference.

Make our community better and make our world better. I just can't explain it.

Similarly, ASPIRING1 shared having recognized a call to leadership right after her first year of teaching: “I knew that I wanted to do something more and something bigger. I went through one year of teaching, and then decided to go back to school and earn my master's degree.” AP7 also began her education to pursue administration within her first year of classroom teaching:

When I went into teaching, I immediately started working on my admin degree because I knew I always was going to move into administration. I just feel I can reach more people. I'm working with kids, parents, staff, and I just always felt if I could reach and help more people, that was better for me.

Four women indicated realizing early on that administration would be in their futures and pursued administration education early in their careers.

Alternatively, several women stated that they reached a point in their career in which they needed a change and were seeking new challenges. AP1 asked herself, “After 17 years of teaching, what’s next was my question. I felt like I really built a strong program and there was nowhere else to go. I met my goals. The next thought was administration.” ASPIRING2 had some early leadership experiences and realized she had discovered her passion:

I think that my interest in it did start when I was in a program director position and then kind of bouncing around doing different jobs—the MTSS part of the school and everything else. Going back to the classroom left me with that itch, realizing that I did miss it.

ASPIRING7 said it was her work with new teachers on her site that made her examine her work and look to find greater purpose. “That process of working with [novice teachers] and working as a site facilitator inspired me to go back and get my master’s in educational leadership. I felt like there’s more to teaching than just being in the classroom.” ASPIRING8 was also motivated by her work with new teachers and the excitement she experienced from mentorship, “It was when I started to become a mentor teacher to new teachers at our school. I started to see that I could empower teachers to be amazing individuals in their classroom for their students. That was really fulfilling.”

Others remarked on inspiration from an administrator who encouraged them to take on a leadership role, which made them realize it was something they were interested in exploring. AP2 had a great deal of experience coaching and teaching. Then, “Due to our freshman failures and that type of stuff, I was asked to become the freshman dean and

athletic director.” AP6 pursued a different focus for a master’s degree when an administrator approached her about leadership:

I then started my master’s degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), and I had my current administrator at the time, he said, “Well what are you doing? Because you can already go and teach adults with the degrees you have. Have you thought about administration?”

AP8 was also encouraged by administrators, who challenged her to begin down the path. She explained, “I moved forward in administration with a little help with some principals because you’re just like I don’t know, it’s just scary, and it’s a lot.” ASPIRING5 was encouraged by her principal. “A couple of years ago, [my principal] was like, ‘You know, I’m retiring soon, and I need to have someone that I know knows this system because our school is so unique...have you thought about it?’” Administrators asked ASPIRING6 to fill in for them when she could. She explained, “I started being asked to step into leadership roles, such as being a department lead, running summer programming, or session programs.” ASPIRING3 was encouraged her peers to pursue a leadership role. She explained, “People started to tell me, I’d work for you. I wish you could be the principal, or I wish I could work for you.”

Both AP3 and AP4 had begun to take on some leadership roles and responsibilities while classroom teachers. Their leadership roles and experiences made them realize they wanted to lead a school. AP3 explained, “My first 17 years in education were in [another state]. I was very, very involved in a leadership position when I was there. I was on a lot of committees—district level committees. I did some trainings for

the state in 2000 with standards. I came [here] with vast experience in leadership.”

Meanwhile, AP4 noted she was split between leadership and teaching:

I was doing so much teacher leader stuff. I was leading SLO committees, I was still leading accreditations, I was department lead. In high schools those [departments] are big; it's like 17 people. I was just spread really thin. While I was trying to do right by my classroom, I was just feeling like I was torn between two worlds.

Though the AP role comes with a significant salary increase, only three participants mentioned money as a factor when considering school administration. A starting middle school AP salary is \$74,802 while a high school AP salary starts at \$87,334. Both AP5 and AP6 discussed at the financial increase in terms of how it would impact their families. AP5 identified her most important motivation as, “First and foremost, my family and our livelihood and way of life.” AP6 spoke about the importance of the financial piece after finding herself as a single mother:

I kind of saw the writing on the walls that, you know, as a teacher, I wasn't making a whole lot of money. I was already towards the top of the pay scale on the teacher pay scale. And so for me, it was kind of a move financially.

ASPIRING3 noted that finances was a consideration. She explained, “It just go to the point where I thought, okay, and in education, of course, money wise, how are you going to make more? You got to move up somehow.”

Leader as Dean of Students

All eight assistant principals served as a dean of students prior to becoming an assistant principal. One participant was a middle school dean for one year, four

participants were in a middle or high school dean position for three years, and three participants were in the role for four years. For many of the participants, this transitional position was a difficult experience. AP1 noted, “In our school district, the first exposure to administration was a dean job. I was hired as a part time elementary, part time middle school dean, which made it really challenging.” AP4 explained the challenges of her first year as a dean.

It was a hard year. I’m not going to lie. It was really scary. I remember actually vomiting and being so nervous. You spend your whole career, life, doing a certain thing, defining yourself by it, and then to change and do a 180...I don’t know what I’m doing.

AP5 expressed struggles with the transition and discussed feeling unprepared for the challenges, especially with students, that she faced:

As a dean, in particular, you just get thrown in and you go from complete one side of your career to another. This was stuff that was happening daily, moment to moment in the school, and I was the responsible person to work with them and mitigate that. There’s not really training. I really struggled with that. I didn’t understand how to manage my own personal feelings in real time with students during that time. I wanted to save them all.

Though the transition was daunting and scary, these administrators seemed to have worked through it; ultimately, they learned and grew from the position and experience. AP6 is appreciative of the experiences and breadth of knowledge the position developed in her:

I was the dean at a special needs school for kids who are socially and emotionally disturbed and have severe mental illness. That was a very difficult but very awesome experience. Because not only did I have to learn how to be an administrator, but I had never worked with kids like that before.

AP8 mentioned that it was her experiences as a dean that helped her realize she wanted to work with older students, rather than younger students: “I ended up being the middle school and high school dean my last two years. Again, never really imagining I would want to be working with high school kids.” AP2 had a positive experience working with teachers to improve the academic achievement of freshmen students:

Due to our freshman failures and that type of stuff, I was asked to become the freshman dean and athletic director. I was in charge of getting our failure rates down to single digits with a team of teachers. We formed a little academy. We did that within a two year period.

AP3 was also mentioned the different facets of the school she was afforded to see as a dean: “My last year, I was the athletic director, but I had dean responsibilities as well. I was in charge of the graduation rate for the senior class. My job intersected many things.”

Two of the aspiring APs are currently in dean positions in high schools.

ASPIRING7 noted she is “the dean of students. Primarily, I do a lot of discipline. But I also work closely with the MTSS team and the PBIS team, along with administration.”

ASPIRING8 has also been pleased with the experiences she has had:

I started off as a dean at a middle school, and then I was overaged to a high school. Actually, it’s been the best thing ever because I’ve really learned to fine tune my leadership skills when dealing not only with students, but parents.

Two of the assistant principals and one aspiring leader spoke about one professional development practice of the dean job that was immensely beneficial to their careers, the dean collegial.

AP3 spoke about the dean collegial and discussed how valuable the meetings were, especially pertaining to working through current problems and discussing how to move forward in the AP role.

There was a dean cohort that one of the administrators ran. A lot of the current vice principals and principals went to that dean cohort with me. That was positive to have these meetings, I guess you could call them, with other deans. It was kind of training in a sense. We had meetings, I think, once a month. We talked about relevant things that were going on that we needed to know in order to move up beyond being a dean. That was extremely positive.

AP4 had a positive experience within this collegial, as well. It was an opportunity for her to build connections with other people in the same position and experiencing the same challenges. She has retained professional connections from her group.

They had a dean collegial. You were required to go to it for one year minimum, and you still got a professional credit. [That] is where I met two friends and colleagues for life out of there. You're like, I don't know what's going on. Why are things so hard? Why are there so many emotions? There is so much behavior, what do you mean everything's bullying? It's crazy, and so it was wonderful.

ASPIRING8, who is currently a dean of students, was a participant of the dean collegial her first year as a dean of students. Her group has chosen to continue to meet, even though it is no longer required by the school district. She expressed:

We are part of a dean collegial that we get together. We were new deans the first year and then we've just continued on. It is so nice to have that support where we can get ideas and do all that stuff.

Interview and Pool Process

As participants began to apply to assistant principal positions, they had to first be accepted into the assistant principal pool. Per the HR description of the hiring policies and procedures, candidates must first apply to the assistant principal pool. They must submit an application consisting of their five most recent evaluations, current resume, letter of interest, four references, a release of records, their administrative license, and a questionnaire. After they submit that, their applications are screened. If they have the minimum qualifications (five years of satisfactory certified contract experience and an administrator endorsement), then they are invited to participate in an interview for the hiring pool. The committee for the hiring pool is made up of an area superintendent, an elementary school principal, a middle school principal, a high school principal, and a human resources staff member. If that hiring committee approves the candidate, then they are accepted into the AP pool. Only at that point are they eligible to apply to specific jobs at school sites. For many participants, the pool process was a significant hurdle.

AP4 expressed concerns over not having the right experiences for the pool process:

When you throw people into these positions and you've not groomed them, nurtured them, or given them opportunities to kind of fall on their face a little bit...then we're mad when they don't interview well for principalship or an

assistant principalship because they haven't done it yet because you make it so tough to get into the pool.

AP6 shared these concerns, especially as they related to working with teachers on their evaluations:

The pool interview questions are very vague, and it's hard to speak to...for example, the dean interviews are the first time I went for the AP pool. I couldn't speak to teacher evaluations because deans aren't allowed to do teacher evaluations. But then there's questions about that, so I feel like that's really unfair.

Aspiring leaders mentioned they were frustrated when their attempts to get into the pool were thwarted. ASPIRING4 noted, "It becomes a little discouraging because the process to get into the pool is intense, and it's very difficult to get in. Then it's frustrating because there is this cry that there are not enough people to select from." ASPIRING7 felt negatively about her experiences with the pool process as well:

One thing I can say about being an aspiring leader is the pool process handicaps professionals. It doesn't necessarily look at the qualifications, rather at how well and how perfect you answer the set of questions for the interview panel that you have.

Many of the candidates indicated that the hiring process at the individual school sites was unfair. Some current APs expressed concern that someone had been identified for the position before the interviews even began, often based on who the applicants knew. These were illustrative in AP remarks. AP1 felt that she was just a placeholder in many interviews. "I was just going through the process, and I was being the other person

that they needed to fill to make sure the right amount of people were interviewed.” AP3 indicated that she often did not receive opportunities because of who she knew. “For a while there, it was almost as if you didn’t know the right person, you weren’t getting an interview or you weren’t getting a job.”

Two of the aspiring leaders also spoke to having limited opportunities based upon the people they know, rather than the experiences or professional qualities they have. ASPIRING3 pointed out, “I’m not saying it’s complete nepotism, but I do think who you know makes a difference, I think, when getting an interview.” ASPIRING4 feels that there are now fewer positions available because of the unfair advantages some people had in the past, “I would say my negative experience is that the process for our district wasn’t always streamlined or fair. There are people that are in administrative positions that are there because of who they knew.”

Transition to AP Role

Some APs struggled to adjust to the new responsibilities of the job. AP1 struggled because of a lack of exposure to instructional leader practices: “It was hard to prepare yourself for an assistant principal job because you’re an instructional leader. Now that was a big shift.” AP5 also shared some of the struggles she had in her first year as an AP, which was also her first year away from the school she had previously spent most of her career:

It was hard as a first year AP because I went into a school where I didn’t know the culture. I didn’t know the staff. I come in as technically the boss [because] I’m an evaluator of a group of teachers that I’ve never met. I have to prove to them that I am somebody that they need to trust and follow the lead. It was really hard.

Both AP7 and AP8 echoed the challenge of this transition as it pertained to their careers and experiences. AP7 noted, “Back then, it was super hard to move into administration. It takes a lot of dedication.” AP8 discussed the challenge specifically as it related to moving into the high school role: “But also knowing that again getting into high school, especially AP, is hard. It’s not easy.”

For some of the APs, their experiences as dean were helpful in preparing them for their new role. AP3 expressed her experiences during her four years as dean and athletic director were tremendously helpful as she adjusted to her new role: “My first year as an assistant principal—and I’d already been doing the job, so I walked in ready to go—it wasn’t like anyone had to tell me anything.” AP6 was given advice to take the transition slowly and learn all she could as a dean—advice she was very thankful for:

I have taken my time, as far as moving up in positions, because that was some advice I had been given when I first became a dean from a very veteran administrator, and I’m really glad for that advice because going from the classroom into administration is very different. You just don’t have all the same stresses; they’re just very different.

Though AP5 mentioned how difficult the transition was, she expressed appreciation at having taken her time and spending three years as a dean in order to learn all she could before becoming an AP: “I just really wanted to make sure I felt ready and comfortable to make the jump to be an assistant principal, which is a significant difference.”

The aspiring leaders indicated being nervous about transitioning to the role and whether preparation for the challenges. ASPIRING8 discussed that though she has a great deal of experience in discipline and athletics, she has not had exposure to other AP jobs

and responsibilities: “We don’t get the experience of shadowing another assistant principal that is doing grounds, custodial, and the master schedule. We don’t get to follow one that’s doing assessments and what that looks like. I don’t feel I’m adequately prepared.” ASPIRING2 acknowledged it was going to take some time to build the trust of a staff, especially as a first year AP: “I might seem inexperienced, but I’m really here to show you that I not only can do this work, that I’m willing to do it wholeheartedly so that we all succeed.”

Future Aspirations

One important reflection among participants was about their futures. There was broad variation in their shared aspirations. Four AP participants are close to retirement and indicated that they would likely retire in the AP position. AP1 noted, “I’m at the tail end of my career, and I have no aspirations of becoming a principal. That would be the natural course, but I feel like I’m a pretty solid assistant principal.” AP2 also does not plan to pursue a principalship: “I’m at 30 years right now. I’m not quite sure I’m going to go on any further. I just plan to continue to work with kids in the position that I’m in to get them to attain their goals.” AP3 likes the position she is in and does not want to go through the pool and interview process again. That process serves as a significant deterrent for her:

I’m about a year out from retirement. When I got into leadership as the dean and my first years as an AP, I thought I would do the AP job for a year or two and then get into the principal pool and finish my career as a principal or someplace [working at the district level]. But in the end, I have decided that I kind of like

being a wing man. I kind of like being a vice principal. Honestly, I didn't want to go through the process to become a principal.

AP7 plans to retire in her position, but her goal is to maintain importance to the administrative team and the work they do: "That's kind of what I aspire to is really to still be relevant."

The other four AP participants have aspirations to become a principal, but some are more dedicated to that move than others. Though AP5 is leaving the possibility on the table, she is not sure what her future holds:

I think I want to be a principal at some point. That has definitely, on the sliding scale, gone back toward the middle more than it was. I do feel like at the 10-year mark as an assistant principal, I'm going to sort of reassess what I want to do or where I want to go, if there's a different path for me, and maybe that's just a different school. Maybe that is a principalship. Maybe that's a district level thing.

AP4 is planning to apply to principalships at the end of the school year and potentially take on a principal role for the next school year:

I know there's going to be a couple middle schools opening up. I may not get it.

But I think my resume is probably more advanced than other APs in my position. I want to be a principal for sure, and I didn't know that even a year ago. I thought I could just be an AP.

AP6 also expressed feeling a calling to continue to ascend the leadership ladder and predicts upward movement in her future: "I do think, you know, eventually I'll either be a principal or I'll be a director of something." AP8 also plans to continue to move up into a principalship and maybe even has aspirations of superintendent:

I do think about being a principal. I don't want to go back to elementary though. It would be cool to be a high school principal, whether that's in the cards for me, I don't know. But that definitely would be an aspiration of mine. And honestly, I would love to be an area superintendent, and maybe even have a smaller school district as superintendent. I love the big picture."

Five of the aspiring leaders also indicated an interest in becoming a principal in their futures.

- "Principal. But I think that is more of a short-sighted goal for me right now. I don't necessarily know that I want to be a principal for the next 30 years of my career." (ASPIRING2)
- "I would like to move up into a dean's role into an AP role and then eventually into a principalship." (ASPIRING3)
- "My dream is to be a principal, so I knew I always wanted to be a principal." (ASPIRING4)
- "There's something tell me I should do a charter school. Open a school, maybe K-8." (ASPIRING5)
- "I definitely want to be an AP and get some experience in that. I think, when it's all said and done, I would like to be a principal." (ASPIRING7)

Alternatively, ASPIRING1 and ASPIRING7 were firm in their desire to hold school leadership roles but did not specifically name ending at a principalship as the final goal. ASPIRING1 says, "I would like to be some type of leader. I just want to impact the schools on bigger than my classroom." ASPIRING6 knows she wants some leadership experience, but it does not have to be in a principal role: "I'd like to be part of a

leadership team. I'm not going to say principal or whatever, but I'd like to be part of a leadership team."

At this point in her career, ASPIRING8 does not plan to pursue a principalship.

She noted:

I won't say I'll never become a principal because I also said I would never go into admin, and here I am. So that could change. I've yet to meet a principal, except in middle school, that is connected with their kids.

ASPIRING8 is deterred by her perception that principals do not have strong connections with students. However, that student connection is important for her. She values those relationships too much to move that far away from students.

The Role of the Mentor

One critical part of the journey to AP is having a mentor. Six of the assistant principal participants discussed their mentors and the positive impact those mentors had on their career trajectories.

- "Having mentors and being able to learn on the job training, that was huge. Because I wasn't prepared until you actually live the role of an assistant principal of a school at a school site." (AP1)
- "I am a high strung, anxious, go getter, Energizer bunny type. He is opposite, yet just as effective. It was really meant to be that I was paired with someone that showed me when to freak out, when to take your time, and when to be serious. He was just patient, and he would just sit there and make me click things in IC (Infinite Campus) in terms of don't forget this or this might happen here. He was just like, no matter what you decide, we have your back." (AP4)

- “I found opportunities to kind of shadow and connect unofficially with current school administrators.” (AP5)
- “For three years, I had a very solid, very supportive administrator who sent me to all sorts of trainings, taught me everything I know, worked very much in the same silo. With me, it wasn’t a principal, assistant principal kind of deal. We did everything together. The communication was very open.” (AP6)
- “After my fifth year, my principal said, you’ve learned everything I can teach you about administration. She kicked me out, told me to go out there and apply for some administrative jobs. I’ve had amazing mentors—amazing—in my career. I’ve been so lucky.” (AP7)
- “My two last principals that I had really just kind of mentored me and gave me that little last push that I needed. I really think having a principal and having the ability to be like a backup principal administrator at your school while you’re teaching is, I would say, one of the biggest things.” (AP8)

Four of the aspiring school leaders spoke about the importance of the mentorships they have experienced along the course of their careers. Many of these mentors have pushed or encouraged them to keep working toward an AP role.

ASPIRING1 noted that she is supported by her current administrators and the exposure they offer her as she looks to ascend the leadership ladder. “I’m lucky to have bosses that support me and what I want to do, but I know that that’s not the case at every school.” ASPIRING8 also looked to the support of her principal when she was first considering moving into leadership. Her principal’s perspective helped motivate her to pursue a degree in educational leadership:

My principal was one of the mentee principals, and I went and talked to her. I said, “Do you even see me as going anywhere outside of this classroom?” She goes, “Yes, absolutely. I totally see you going outside of this classroom and doing amazing things, not only supporting our students, but our community as well. I really think you should do this.”

ASPIRING7 spoke about the value of the administrative perspective that has been shared with her by administrators at her school and other administrators she has connected with throughout her career. “I think I’ve worked with really awesome administrators who’ve been helpful and just very candid with what the job involves, like the good and bad. I think that has been helpful.”

ASPIRING2 was mentored by one of the professors within her leadership program. Her professor served as an inspiration role model:

[One of my professors] was a constant, who was educated and well-rounded and knew everything as we went along. I looked at her and thought she’s such a positive role model all the way through. It was that female leadership position through positive experiences.

Overall, ten of the participants spoke about how influential a mentor was in challenging them to take on leadership and supporting them throughout the transition. These relationships served as important parts of their journey to the AP role.

Similarities and Distinctions between the Cases

The most significant difference between the two groups was related to the daily tasks and responsibilities of the job. When asked what the day to day looked like in their

work, the APs responded with concrete tasks they must do each day. The APs mention jobs such as duty, scheduling, emails, and meetings:

- “Duty takes a lot of my time.” (AP1)
- “I’m in charge of the master schedule and SBAC testing.” (AP3)
- “Duty. I have morning duty, two lunches, after school duty all of the time. Most days you have an IEP after school.” (AP4)
- “Typically, it’s a lot of emails.” (AP5)
- “I am on constant like hall duty, but like I’m on lunch duty, pending a fight happening or something.” (AP6)
- “My day is filled with helping fix or get the right resources we need to maintain an old building with all this new technology. What’s going on in athletics? I have a lot of meetings as well.” (AP7).

Alternatively, the aspiring candidates mention more abstract concepts that they anticipate will take priority throughout the school day. These participants referred to communication, belonging, and supporting students:

- “Constant communication with students, staff, and parents.” (ASPIRING1)
- “The well-being and safety of your students and staff.” (ASPIRING2)
- “Looking at what needs to happen and prioritizing, following the law, making sure special education is handled with care.” (ASPIRING3)
- “Making people feel like they belong here, not just the students, but the staff too.” (ASPIRING4)

- “I’m hoping it will include creating mission, vision, and things like that.”
(ASPIRING6)
- “How can we support [kids]? How can we support the staff so that they can better support kids?” (ASPIRING7)
- “I think, for me, the day to day is just—especially that first year—is just learning. What is my role?” (ASPIRING8)

While both groups discuss the prioritization of working with staff and students, the APs answer with more concrete tasks and responsibilities that make up their day. The group of aspiring administrators certainly know what they want their goals to be, but are not as specific or concrete about the actions and tasks they may do each day to complete those more abstract goals and ideas.

Summary

Several themes developed as the participant interviews were analyzed and compared with HR data from the lens of each of the research questions. In relation to RQ1, the participants primarily identified building relationships with staff, working with students, and managing change and transition as the most important roles they have as APs. The APs struggled with managing the tasks associated with the school day and the time they must dedicate to their positions. For RQ2, participants identified several shared steps on the leadership pathway: a call to action, the dean of students role, participating in the interview and pool process, transitioning to the AP role, considering future aspirations, and the importance of having a mentor along the way. Though the aspiring APs have not completed the path to an AP position, they have all experienced a call to action and two of them are in the dean of students role.

Though the two groups drew on similar experiences from within the field of education, the main difference was the concrete tasks and responsibilities associated with an AP position that the APs specifically named. On the other hand, the aspiring leaders know the goals of the job but did not have the same grasp of the ways to spend their time during the school day to ensure those goals are accomplished.

Chapter Five will interpret the results of the participant interviews in relation to each research question, make important conclusions about the AP position and role within schools, offer implications for practice, and recommend further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, expectations, and aspirations of women who are currently secondary assistant principals compared to women who aspire to the role. Two research questions guided this study:

1. What are female leaders' and aspiring female leaders' perceptions and expectations of the assistant principal?
2. How do female leaders and aspiring female leaders understand the pathway to the assistant principal role?

Two groups of participants were interviewed and HR documents (AP job descriptions, hiring statistics for school leadership positions, hiring policies and procedures for administrators, and the administrative salary schedule) were studied. The data was the basis for the comparative case study design. The information from this study provided a broad understanding of this important administrative role in the secondary setting within one school district. This chapter begins by discussing the summary of the results and comparing the experiences of the participants with the important findings from the literature. The chapter includes conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Perceptions of Female APs and Expectations within the Role

The eight females who are currently in the position of AP spoke at length about the details of their position. The eight aspiring leaders spoke about their perceptions of the duties of an assistant principal. There was some discrepancy between the two groups in terms of abstract versus concrete tasks that APs are responsible for during the day.

However, many similarities emerged. Overall, there were three key parts of the role that the majority of the participants spoke about: building relationships with staff, working with students, and managing change and transitions for staff. Because of the many roles APs take on, two of the biggest challenges for these participants emerged: managing the school day and the time they must dedicate to the job.

Cansoy et al. (2021) identified specific job responsibilities and duties of assistant principals that negatively intensified their work. Several of the duties that led to intensification of the job for the assistant principals in that study aligned with the experiences of the assistant principals in this one. Participants in both studies spent their school day working on student discipline, overseeing and managing students, scheduling coverages of teachers, dealing with parent-teacher communication problems, evaluating teachers, and monitoring student attendance. Glantz (1994) also created a list of what APs viewed to be the most important responsibilities. Though the research is from more than 20 years ago, the findings remain valid and are supported by the female participants. The top three responsibilities of an AP were teacher training, staff development and in-service, and curriculum development. The participants in the current study had limited time, if any, to devote to those important tasks. There is a clear disconnect between what APs believe to be the most important parts of the job and what tasks they ultimately have to prioritize during any given school day.

The findings about the daily responsibilities of the job align with the conclusions of Barnett et al. (2012), whose participants spoke about the importance of working relationships within the school. Barnett determined, “[Novice and experienced assistant principals] sense the need to develop solid working relationships with people within the

school (e.g. other administrators, teachers, custodial staff, and students) and outside the school (e.g. parents and community members” (p.115). The participants in the current study also dedicated a great deal of their time and energy to the relationships with staff and students. Those relationships were foundational to the majority of their work.

The importance of building and maintaining strong relationships with staff, students, and families for female APs connects to important conclusions within Social Role Theory. Women are often perceived to be sensitive, warm, and nurturing (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Indeed, when leaders do possess these traits, they can be advantageous in the maintenance of those important relationships within a school environment. However, these perceptions of women are not always accurate as not all women may consider themselves to have any or all of those characteristics. Furthermore, those qualities can alternatively work against women because they are soft skills that can be seen as preventing women from making tough decisions (Lipkin, 2019).

The overwhelming tasks in a school day and the amount of time dedicated to the work are also reflected in the literature. Cranston et al. (2004) found that assistant principals have long working hours, immense pressure within the job, and an increase in variety of the tasks they must complete. The results of this study align with Cranston et al.’s (2004) findings regarding time constraints. For several of the participants, this challenge seemed to have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. Zheng et al. (2021) concluded that the increasing demand of followers during the pandemic has impaired the well-being of leaders. The increase of the needs from students, teachers, parents, and district office leadership has negatively impacted school leaders. The number of tasks and events that happen during a school day are often in conflict with APs completing the

responsibilities assigned to their job. Therefore, the participants of this study spent indicated spending considerable time outside of school to ensure all responsibilities are taken care of and completed.

Balikçi (2020) suggests that for assistant principals to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently, “the job area of assistant principal needs a defined and restricted assignment plan...including the roles and jobs at a school...[to] simplify and limit it as much as possible” (p. 388). A job description with more clarity and strict boundaries for the position would be one possible approach to the exorbitant amount of time assistant principals put in as a way to accomplish the large number of tasks and responsibilities they have.

Unfortunately, if the assistant principal position continues to be as daunting as it is now, it will impact the balance of work and home life for individuals in the role. This has the potential to significantly impact female candidates, especially if they plan to pursue a principalship. There is already a teacher shortage that has only worsened with COVID-19 pandemic teaching conditions (Burroughs, 2022). Unfortunately, that teacher shortage has the potential to decrease the qualified candidates to begin to pursue the school leadership trajectory.

Eckman (2004) concluded that women tend to wait until their children are older to pursue a principalship because they do not have to balance the needs of their independent, older children with the needs of their jobs. This conclusion aligns closely with AP1’s assertion that she would not have pursued administration when her children were young because she would have missed out on too much with her children. The four APs who plan to eventually seek out a principalship are already taking into account the

balance of their home and work lives. This finding is fitting with the Social Role Theory because of the “second shift.” The second shift is the phenomenon in which women report doing twice as much housework and child care as their husbands (Croft et al., 2014). The time women must dedicate to the role of an AP has the potential to interfere with the time they have to dedicate to their responsibilities at home.

Transitioning from Teacher to AP

The AP participants of this study reflected upon the route that they took to their current AP position, and the aspiring leaders discussed the plans they had to eventually pursue an AP position. From this interview data, a clear path to the AP position emerged: a call to action, the dean of students role, undergoing the interview and pool process, transitioning to the AP role, considering future aspirations, and the importance of having a mentor along the way.

The pathway that all eight of the AP participants in this study align with McGough’s (2003) work. They all pursued the classic route, which consists of moving from a teacher to an assistant principal position. There was one addition to this pathway in the school district these participants are employed: the role of dean of students. That was an integral position for all of the participants before assuming the AP role. Four of the participants plan to move to a principalship in their future, which would complete the classic route. Two of the aspiring leaders are also on this pathway as they are currently in dean of students role and plan to take on an assistant principalship in the next year or two. Three of the aspiring leaders are on the teacher leadership route and are currently in a teacher leadership job. One is a data coach and two are building learning facilitators.

These positions are designed to help them gain the experience they need to attain an assistant principal role in the future.

A critical finding that emerged from the participants' interviews is that most of them felt unprepared to transition to an administrative job. Some experienced this concern when moving to the dean of students role, others affirmed it more when becoming an AP, and some felt it during both transitions. Cranston et al. (2004) found that "preparation (training, selection, induction, professional development) for the deputy principalship needs to change" (p. 239). The experiences of these women certainly support that conclusion. There needs to be more preparation for the transition and more formal supports during the transition to ensure leaders are prepared to take on the challenges that await them.

All of the current APs spoke about how important and helpful it was to have a strong mentor within their transition. This aligns closely with Cohen and Schechter (2019) who recommended a structured mentoring process with "the most suitable person for mentoring, guidance and emotional support is an assistant principal with three years of experience who has just finished the process of entering the role" (p. 108). They note that this form of mentorship would be preferable to principals who do not typically have the time or emotional availability.

Another important part of the journey to AP that three participants shared was a group called the dean collegial. This was a group of deans who met monthly to discuss the role, their challenges, and how to move forward into an assistant principal role. Cohen and Schechter (2019) propose an assistant principal forum, similar to the dean collegial, in which veteran and novice assistant principals convene regular and discuss

issues, practice responses, and provide emotional help within the context of the group. The females in this study specifically pointed to their continued need for relationships, whether through mentoring or other informal systems of support. This would be an important element of support for new APs to rely on, especially after having a similar experience from the dean collegial.

In line with their intentional efforts to create systems of support, many of the females mentioned having been inspired, getting nudged, or encouraged by another individual to pursue the leadership pathway. Through the Social Role Theory, researchers have noted that women in leadership are often less confident in their ability to take on leadership roles, even if they are actually more prepared than men. Given that many indicated needing that extra motivation or “nudge” supports this previous assertion. Thus, having structured processes to build confidence toward this pathway could be an essential contribution to the recruitment, retention, and future success of women in the role of AP.

Implications for Practice

Two important implications emerge from this research. The first implication is the critical need for assistance in the transition from classroom teacher to school administrator. It is clear that the two positions of principal and assistant principal have vastly different responsibilities and require different skill sets. Though all participants had a master’s degree in school administration, they initially struggled with the daily responsibilities of the job. There needs to be a more formalized transitional and induction program to support teachers as they transition into this role. There should be more preparation before the transition and more support once they become school administrations, in either the dean of students or AP role. Two ways to support candidates

are a formal mentor program and an AP cohort led by current APs within the same school district.

Ten participants who discussed how positive having a mentor was during their transition. This is an indicator of one place to start. Creating a formal mentor program, similar to mentorship of new teachers, for rising and aspiring school administrators would be a great step. This kind of program would identify successful school leaders who could then help prepare aspiring leaders and support them through at least the first year in the position.

Another way to support the transition to the AP role is to expand the effort of the dean collegial with an AP collegial for novice APs. A group like this should be led by veteran and successful APs or current retirees who have insight into the job and can provide assistance and guidance to novice APs as they work through their first year. This is also an opportunity for APs to build connections with other people in the same position and meet more mentors to help guide them, even in situations outside of the group meeting and setting. It also gives participants an opportunity to build relationships with other administrators in the same position in the school district. These kinds of professional bonds are critical because there are so few administrators within any single school. School districts should build in opportunities for administrators to network with other administrators outside of their own school buildings.

The other critical implication of this research is that school administrators at all levels (i.e., dean of students, AP, and principal) appear to have increasingly evolving and expanding roles. They have too many responsibilities and not enough time and flexibility to accomplish what they need to. The participants in this study made it clear that it is

unreasonable and unsustainable to expect school leaders to work long hours during the school day, over the weekend, and through school breaks. There needs to be more support, clearer boundaries and definitions of job responsibilities, and bigger administrative teams so that the workload of school administrators becomes more manageable.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based upon this research, there are several ideas for further research that became evidence. The first would be to closely examine how men experience the role of the assistant principal and compare it to the experiences of female assistant principals. Did they have similar motivations to pursue school administration? Are their day-to-day experiences within the role the same? Do they have the same hardships? What are the aspirations of male assistant principals? These would be some of the questions that would drive the research to understand whether or not gender impacts the assistant principal experience. It will also be important to look beyond gender when consider school leadership positions. Another important factor to consider is the racial/ethnic demographic of school leaders and how that impacts the school leadership path and experience. There is also potential to look at intersectionality and compare the impacts of both gender and racial/ethnic background.

It would also be relevant to look at the preparation programs that APs experienced to examine the different outcomes of their experiences based on their preparation programs. Were some programs more helpful in assisting APs in feeling prepare for their jobs? What were the characteristics of the most helpful preparation programs?

Furthermore, this research could benefit with a similar examination of the role of principal. The same questions that drove this research would also be relevant as they pertain to the role of a principalship. What stresses do both jobs share? How are the positions and responsibilities different? How do individuals in each role view the jobs and responsibilities of one another? These questions would be relevant to both positions and provide an in-depth understanding of the critical individuals who run public schools across the nation.

Finally, it would be relevant to include how principals can best support aspiring APs and current APs who plan to be principals. A quantitative analysis could be used to identify pairings of aspiring leaders and principals based upon leadership styles and see how those similarities and differences impact the mentorship and preparation of the aspiring leaders.

Conclusions

Though the focus of this research was on women who are current assistant principals and those aspiring to the role, the school district these participants worked in employed a majority of female administrators in almost all areas. This is promising for the field of public education. To illustrate AP8 concluded, "I have never felt like my being a female has kept me from any role in [the school district]. I don't feel like that's ever been a barrier for me where it could be in other districts and other places." Indeed, the female representation of the administrators within this district supports this expressed belief. With a female superintendent, a female deputy superintendent, 80% female area superintendents, and a majority of female assistant principals and principals at nearly

every school level, it is essential to acknowledge that the district examined for this study is led by women.

Even so, there were unique challenges shared by the aspiring and current female administrators, including learning to balance time and work and home life, especially when it comes to their children. Half of the AP participants had children at home, though that was not necessarily mentioned as a factor by all of them in terms of balancing their job and whether or not they would eventually pursue a principalship in the future.

However, what was evident from all participants—both current APs and aspiring APs—is the difficult transition from teacher to admin and the workload of the position itself. These two conclusions probably do not discriminate to women, and they cannot be ignored. It is clear that teachers need more preparation and support when they begin to pursue an administrative job. It is also evident that administrators need more boundaries within their work so they are not expected to be working during school hours, evenings, weekends, and during breaks. It could be that the demands of the position have simply grown too broad. With clearer understanding of the problem, hopefully more changes can be made to ensure the transition to a leadership transition is smoother and more manageable for all.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions—Current Assistant Principals

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. What is your current position within the school district?
3. How long have you been in this position?
4. What positions did you have before entering this position?
5. At which point in your career did you decide to pursue moving into a leadership position? What steps did you take to pursue leadership within the school district?
6. What were your professional experiences—positive and negative—as you attained your current position?
7. Did you face any personal challenges in the attainment of your current position? What were they?
8. How would you describe the day-to-day responsibilities of your current job?
9. What are the most challenging parts of your job?
10. What would you say are the most rewarding parts of your job?
11. What do you aspire to do in your career in the future?
12. What motivates you in pursuing your future career path?
13. What challenges do you anticipate as you move through the remainder of your leadership career?

Interview Questions—Aspiring Assistant Principals

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. What is your current position within the school district?
3. How long have you been in this position?
4. What positions did you have before entering this position?
5. At which point in your career did you begin to consider moving into a leadership position? What steps have you taken to pursue leadership within the school district in the future?
6. What were your professional experiences—positive and negative—as you attained your leadership qualifications?
7. Did you face any personal challenges in the attainment of leadership qualifications? What were they?
8. What do you anticipate will be the day-to-day responsibilities of a school leadership position?
9. What do you anticipate will be the most challenging parts of a leadership job?
10. What do you anticipate will be the most rewarding parts of a leadership job?
11. What do you aspire to do in your career in the future?
12. What motivates you in pursuing your future career path?
13. What challenges do you anticipate as you continue to pursue leadership within your career?

Appendix B

a = Masters +16
b = Masters +16
c = Masters + 32

WASHCO COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
CERTIFIED ADMINISTRATORS SALARY SCHEDULE 2021-2022

FERS Increase - 0.25% Salary Reduction
Negotiated Salary Increase = 2.1%
Retrospectively Effective 7/2021

10 Month	Principals K-5 & MS										Principals 5-8 & MS																
	1a	1b	1c	2a	2b	2c	3a	3b	3c	4a	4b	4c	5a	5b	5c	6a	6b	6c	7a	7b	7c	11a	11b	11c	15a	15b	15c
30	64,768	69,689	74,987	66,064	71,085	76,487	67,384	72,505	78,032	83,211	88,974	94,319	85,416	90,742	96,151	101,640	107,209	112,858	118,587	124,396	130,285	136,254	142,293	148,402	154,581	160,830	167,149
31	70,904	76,290	82,090	72,330	78,801	85,312	75,761	81,402	88,143	95,034	102,075	109,266	100,000	106,000	112,100	118,300	124,600	131,000	137,500	144,100	150,800	157,600	164,500	171,500	178,600	185,800	193,100
32	77,440	83,440	89,840	79,640	86,440	93,440	83,440	90,440	97,640	105,040	112,640	120,440	110,440	117,440	124,640	132,040	139,640	147,440	155,440	163,640	172,040	180,640	189,440	198,440	207,640	217,040	226,640
33	84,384	90,884	97,884	87,084	94,484	102,284	92,084	99,484	107,684	116,084	124,684	133,484	123,084	130,484	139,084	147,884	156,884	166,084	175,484	185,084	194,884	204,884	215,084	225,484	236,084	246,884	257,884
34	91,728	98,728	106,328	95,128	102,928	111,128	100,528	108,728	117,328	126,328	135,628	145,228	134,628	143,428	152,628	162,228	172,128	182,228	192,628	203,228	214,028	225,028	236,228	247,628	259,228	271,028	283,028
35	99,472	107,072	115,472	103,672	112,072	120,872	110,072	118,872	128,072	137,672	147,672	158,072	147,072	156,472	166,272	176,472	187,072	198,072	209,472	221,272	233,472	246,072	259,072	272,472	286,272	300,472	315,072
36	107,616	115,816	124,616	112,216	120,816	130,016	119,016	128,216	137,816	147,816	158,216	169,016	157,616	167,416	177,616	188,216	199,216	210,616	222,416	234,616	247,216	260,216	273,616	287,416	301,616	316,216	331,216
37	116,160	124,960	134,360	121,360	130,560	140,360	129,360	138,960	149,160	159,760	170,760	182,160	170,760	181,360	192,460	204,060	216,260	229,060	242,460	256,460	271,060	286,260	302,060	318,460	335,460	352,860	370,860
38	125,104	134,404	144,204	130,404	140,604	151,404	140,604	151,404	162,804	174,804	187,404	200,604	188,604	201,404	215,004	229,204	244,004	259,404	275,404	292,004	309,204	327,004	345,404	364,404	384,004	404,204	425,004
39	134,448	144,148	154,348	139,548	149,748	160,548	149,748	160,548	172,048	184,248	197,148	210,648	198,648	212,248	226,248	240,848	256,048	271,848	288,248	305,248	323,448	342,848	363,448	385,248	408,248	432,448	457,848
40	144,192	154,292	164,892	148,392	158,992	170,192	158,992	170,192	182,892	196,292	210,292	224,892	212,892	226,492	241,692	257,492	273,892	290,892	308,592	327,092	346,492	367,092	388,892	411,892	436,092	461,492	488,092
41	154,436	164,936	175,836	157,536	168,436	180,036	168,436	180,036	192,836	206,236	220,236	234,836	222,836	236,436	251,636	267,436	283,836	300,836	318,536	337,036	357,436	378,836	401,236	424,636	449,036	474,436	500,836
42	165,180	176,080	187,380	167,680	178,980	191,080	178,980	191,080	204,080	218,080	232,080	246,880	234,880	248,480	264,680	281,480	298,880	316,980	335,780	355,280	375,680	397,080	419,480	442,880	467,280	492,680	519,080
43	176,424	187,624	199,224	177,724	189,424	202,024	189,424	202,024	215,824	230,624	245,424	260,224	248,224	262,024	278,824	296,624	315,424	335,224	356,024	377,824	400,624	424,424	449,224	475,024	501,824	529,624	558,424
44	188,168	199,768	211,768	188,768	201,368	214,568	201,368	214,568	229,368	245,168	261,068	277,068	265,068	279,068	296,268	314,668	334,268	355,068	377,068	400,268	424,668	450,268	477,068	505,068	534,268	564,668	596,268
45	200,412	212,412	224,812	199,812	212,812	226,412	212,812	226,412	242,012	258,812	275,812	293,012	281,012	295,012	313,412	332,612	352,612	373,412	395,012	418,412	443,612	470,612	499,412	529,012	560,412	593,612	628,612

Staff size	0-16	17-34	35+
1-30	39	40	43
31-60	41	42	44
61-120	42	43	45
120+	43	44	45

10 Month	July 1 - June 30										20 Vacation Days																	
	1a	1b	1c	2a	2b	2c	3a	3b	3c	4a	4b	4c	5a	5b	5c	6a	6b	6c	7a	7b	7c	11a	11b	11c	15a	15b	15c	
Range 39	Elementary School Assistant Principal (Site range 39-41)																											
Range 40	TJCC Administrative Specialist II																											
Range 41	Elementary School Assistant Principal (Site range 42)																											
Range 42	Assessment Project Specialist II																											
Range 43	C & E Elementary Specialist II Mental Health Program Administrator Professional Learning Specialist II School Improvement Coordinator II																											

11 Month	Middle School Assistant Principal (Site range 39-42)																											
	1a	1b	1c	2a	2b	2c	3a	3b	3c	4a	4b	4c	5a	5b	5c	6a	6b	6c	7a	7b	7c	11a	11b	11c	15a	15b	15c	
Range 35	ACCTP Principal Rite Academy Assistant Principal Student Attendance Coordinator																											
Range 36	Middle School Assistant Principal (Site range 43)																											
Range 37	21st Learning Project Coordinator Accountability and Personal Spec C&I SHAPE and Health Coordinator Element Studies & Distance Ed Coordinator FT Program Coordinator NV K-12S Read/Action/Zoom Coordinator Professional Growth Systems Coordinator Renewing Projects Coordinator Student Activity/Athletic Coordinator TEAM UP Program Coordinator Professional Development Coordinator Tomball High School Assistant Principal TJCC Principal																											
Range 38	Special Education Administrator SSS Instructional Coordinator (NOCES) Transition Coordinator (NOCES) 21st Learning Project Coordinator Accountability and Personal Spec C&I SHAPE and Health Coordinator Element Studies & Distance Ed Coordinator FT Program Coordinator NV K-12S Read/Action/Zoom Coordinator Professional Growth Systems Coordinator Renewing Projects Coordinator Student Activity/Athletic Coordinator TEAM UP Program Coordinator Professional Development Coordinator Tomball High School Assistant Principal TJCC Principal																											
Range 39	21st Learning Project Coordinator Cherie Oversight & Sec 504 Coordinator Counseling Coordinator II Health Service Assistant Director JNOC Director K-12 P&S Coordinator NWRPP Director SPED Professional Development Specialist SSS Admin Compliance Coordinator II Assessment Director Curriculum & Instruction Director Director of Instruction Director of IT & World Languages Director of Services & Talent Health Services Director Professional Learning Director Professional Growth Systems Director SPED Operations Director SPUD Program Director Tomball High School Assistant Principal TJCC Director Rec Engagement & Evaluation Director																											

High School Assistant Principal will be placed at 11 month salary schedule or range equivalent to the site range less the number of AP allocations at the site at the appropriate step

Appendix C

MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Under direction of the principal, serves as assistant instructional leader and assistant administrative officer of a middle school. Incumbent performs related work as required.

EXEMPLARY DUTIES/RESPONSIBILITIES

Exercises vision and provides leadership that appropriately involves staff, parents, students, and the community in the identification and accomplishment of the school's mission; recognizes the individual needs of all staff and students, including those of diverse cultures, backgrounds or abilities; applies effective human relations skills; encourages and develops the leadership of others; analyzes relevant information, makes decisions, delegates responsibility, and provides appropriate support and follow-up; identifies and creatively coordinates the use of available human, material, and financial resources to achieve the school's mission and goals; bonds the school community through shared values and beliefs; initiates and manages constructive change; advances the profession through participation as a member of local, state, and national professional groups.

Articulates beliefs persuasively, effectively defends decisions, explains innovations, and behaves in ways that are congruent with these beliefs and decisions; demonstrates skills in nonverbal communication, including impact of personal image, to communicate a positive image of the school; exemplifies the behavior expected of others; keeps communication flowing to and from the school; communicates effectively with the various constituencies within the school community.

Involves staff, parents, students and the community in setting goals; identifies--in collaboration with staff, parents, and students--the decision-making procedures the school will follow; applies the process of consensus building both as a leader and as a member of a group.

Demonstrates knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment and their relationship to program goals and objectives; encourage students and staff to participate in co-curriculum activities that enhance and complement what is learned in the classroom.

Regularly assesses the teaching methods and strategies being used and ensures that they are appropriate, varied and effective; applies principles of teaching and learning for both children and adults; articulates effective classroom management and planning processes.

Sets high expectations for students, staff, parents, and self; helps teachers understand and apply teaching styles that complement the varied learning styles of students; encourages students and staff alike to set high personal goals and offers encouragement and support in the achievement of those goals; involves others in designing staff development programs that match the goals of the school with the needs of the participants; encourages staff participation in professional development activities; engages in continuing personal and professional development.

Uses a variety of techniques and strategies to assess student performance, individual staff and personal performance, progress toward the achievement of curriculum goals, and the effectiveness of the overall instructional program; be proficient with data management systems and possess the ability to analyze student achievement data; demonstrate an understanding of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) as it relates to student success including familiarity with Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS).

Fosters constructive suggestions from students, staff, parents, and the community for improving the school's program; applies effective observation and conferencing skills; inspires teachers at all levels of skill and experience to acquire new competencies and experiences; demonstrates a level of human relations skills which assures that the evaluation process will be helpful rather than destructive; develops professional growth plan to improve teaching and administrative performance.

Uses collaborative strategic planning to help identify and accomplish the school's mission, goals and objectives; recruits, selects, assigns, and organizes staff in such a way as to assure the greatest potential for the accomplishment of the school's mission; facilitates the identification, training, and monitoring of the staff to insure effective support in accomplishing the strategic plan of the district; attracts volunteers and provides them effective training and meaningful assignments; provides a safe, orderly climate for learning; manages the operation and maintenance of the physical plant.

Applies understanding of the school district budget and its specific implications for the school; involves staff and representative members of the community in the development of school budget priorities, based upon the mission and strategic plan of the district.

Is aware of and subject to appropriate laws of the State, and the regulations of the district and the state Department of Education.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Education/Experience: Any combination of education and experience that would provide the required knowledge and skills is qualifying. A typical way to obtain the knowledge and skills would be:

1. Education: Master's Degree in School Administration or related field;

AND

2. Experience: Five (5) years teaching experience with two (2) concurrent years of site/district/educational leadership in the last five years;

AND

3. Satisfactory evaluations in the last five (5) years.

Knowledge of: Modern instructional techniques and curricular concepts, especially as they are related to the middle school; the vertical structure of the course of study of the District and understand the importance of articulation in these areas; early adolescent and adolescent youth; the District's philosophy of the comprehensive middle school; principles and practices of school administration, including school finances, teaching methods and techniques, evaluations, and program development, applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations, ordinances and policies; human resources development; school law; conflict resolution; public relations; principles of effective management, staff supervision and administration.

Skill at: Planning, organizing, assigning and coordinating the activities of a professional and support staff; presenting ideas effectively, verbally and in writing; dealing constructively with conflict and developing consensus; selecting, supervising and evaluating subordinates; dealing effectively with people within the community; team building; establishing and maintaining effective working relationships with those contacted in the course of work; working with people, staff supervision and administration.

Licenses/Certificates: School Administrator Endorsement must be obtained prior to placement as an administrator. Proper endorsement is necessary for commencement of a contract.

Physical Demands: The work is sedentary. Typically, the employee sits comfortably to do the work. However, there may be some walking; standing; bending; carrying of light items, such as papers, books, or small parts; or driving an automobile. No special physical demands are required to perform the work.

Work Environment: The environment involves everyday risks or discomforts that require normal safety precautions typical of such places as offices, meeting and training rooms, libraries, residences, or commercial vehicles, e.g., use of safe work practices with office equipment, avoidance of trips and falls, observance of fire regulations and traffic signals. The work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

THIS JOB SPECIFICATION SHOULD NOT BE CONSTRUED TO IMPLY THAT THESE REQUIREMENTS ARE THE EXCLUSIVE STANDARDS OF THE POSITION. INCUMBENTS MAY BE REQUIRED TO FOLLOW ANY OTHER INSTRUCTIONS, AND

TO PERFORM ANY OTHER RELATED DUTIES AS MAY BE REQUIRED BY THEIR SUPERVISOR.

The School District is committed to providing a safe and respectful learning and working environment for all students, staff, and visitors. The District prohibits bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, sexual harassment, and/or discrimination based on an individual's actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetic information, veterans or military status, marital status, disability or the presence of any sensory, physical or mental handicap in any of its educational programs/activities and employment, or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The District prohibits discrimination against any youth group listed in Title 36, as a patriotic society, (i.e. Boy Scouts of America) from access to public school facilities use.

Appendix D

HIGH SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Under direction of the principal, serves as an instructional leader and assistant administrative officer of a secondary school. As part of a leadership team, is responsible for site progress toward achieving the school's mission, goals, and plans. Incumbent provides management of site programs, accountability directives, student discipline, and facilities. Incumbent acts as liaison to parents, community, and other district groups. Monitors and assists with student progress, evaluates and ensures high-quality staff performance, and works with parents and the community to ensure every student graduates ready for college and/or a highly-skilled career. Incumbent performs related work as required.

EXEMPLARY DUTIES/RESPONSIBILITIES

Curriculum: Develops and maintains course offerings, course guide, and master schedule, including special academic programs such as AP, IB, or signature academy programs; orders and maintains current textbook materials and records including print and technological texts and research materials; researches and disseminates information about available scholarship programs and student financing for post-high school educational opportunities; serves as site testing coordinator and ensure all tests are administered to ensure reliable results.

Staff: Analyzes needed certified and classified staff allocations by school and department; recruits, hires, retains, and evaluates staff for continuous improvement; recruit staff and maintain records for extra-duty personnel needs; ensures substitute teacher coverage as needed; serves on committees for students with special needs/programs; supervise and/or oversees staff who sponsor student council activities, cheerleading, academic clubs, etc.

Students: Manages the registration, enrollment, and withdrawal of students, including producing school registration timelines and packets; ensures the maintenance of accurate student records, including transcripts, attendance, discipline records; supervises students during regular school day and after school for school events such as dances, athletic/academic events, assemblies, award ceremonies; manages discipline issues, including positive behavior supports, conflict resolution, detention, in-house/at home suspensions, expulsions; administers procedures for working with special needs students, including those who are homebound; and addresses individual needs of all staff and students, including those of diverse cultures, backgrounds or abilities including the development and monitoring of tutoring programs.

Families and Community: Meets with and support family involvement including Boosters, volunteers, parent events; responds to parent/family inquiries concerning school programs, specific student issues, and parent concerns; meets with families to support student attendance and achievement; assists with student teacher/practicum student placement with college/university programs; serves as liaison to school and community police, including Secret Witness and camera surveillance; and assists with referrals to family and community support agencies.

Recordkeeping and Reports: Produces various reports including attendance (absence and tardiness), Count Day, AYP, SIP, MTSS, testing, NW Accreditation, and provides evidence if needed for appeal processes; processes equipment ordering and repairs; develops student and athletic handbooks; ensures accurate procedures are followed for progress reports and student grades; develops data reports that track student progress and needed student interventions; and ensures safety plans are current and scheduled drills are performed and recorded for compliance.

Site and Facilities: Oversees building usage requests; handles daily and special transportation issues; and approves field trips and off-campus activity consent forms including transportation.

Assumes responsibilities of the principal when needed or when delegated by the principal.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Education/Experience: Any combination of education and experience that would provide the required knowledge and skills is qualifying. A typical way to obtain the knowledge and skills would be:

1. Education: A Master's Degree in School Administration or related field;

AND

2. Experience: Five (5) years teaching experience with two (2) concurrent years of site/district/educational leadership in the last five years;

AND

3. Satisfactory evaluations in the last five (5) years.

Knowledge of: Aligning programs, practices, and resources to support teaching and learning processes; develop a collaborative work environment; guiding employees through the individual professional growth system process; policies, laws, and regulations; managing human resources; performance-based evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics, peer-assisted review panels, walkthroughs, self-reflections); interpreting law as

related to education and schooling; accessing community resources; managing the conditions and dynamics of a diverse school community; and handling adversity.

Skill at: Communicating clearly and present information persuasively; collecting, analyzing, and presenting data in understandable manner to a variety of stakeholders; using frequent data collections to assess student performance and modify plans for student achievement; applying motivational theories; adapting systems, processes, and procedures to unique problems; aligning resources effectively e.g., budget, time, space, and personnel; managing time to prioritize critical tasks and manage multiple issues in a logical, sequential manner; prioritizing individual time and the time of others on critical issues and a logical sequence; handling legal issues related to the school community and its stakeholders; utilizing technology to support operations and management; using a variety of communications tools to reach within and beyond the school community; communicating effectively with large-scale audiences to create confidence and inspire action; presenting facts without distortion, bias, or personal prejudice; and solving difficult problems through collaborative solutions.

Attributes/Dispositions: Thinking strategically and is flexible and adaptable; performing multiple tasks simultaneously; pursues tasks with energy, drive, and the need to persevere; exhibits selfcontrol and calm during stressful/emergency situations; accepts responsibility and the challenges it brings; makes decisions in a fair, equitable, and timely manner; regularly evaluates decisions for effectiveness and possible revision for continuous improvement; sets high expectations and standards for all members of the community: students, staff, families, and self; believes all students can learn and be successful; inspires a sense of urgency for success and is results-oriented; builds authentic, productive relationships and knows every student by name and face; models inclusive practices and an appreciation for collaboration and diversity; regularly reads the latest educational research and policies from an educated, critical stance; views issues through a perspective of social justice and equity; and values staff, family involvement, and other stake-holders in school decision-making.

Licenses/Certificates: School Administrator Endorsement must be obtained prior to placement as an administrator. Proper endorsement is necessary for commencement of a contract.

Physical Demands: The work is sedentary. Typically, the employee sits comfortably to do the work. However, there may be some walking; standing; bending; carrying of light items, such as papers, books, or small parts; or driving an automobile. No special physical demands are required to perform the work.

Work Environment: The environment involves everyday risks or discomforts that require normal safety precautions typical of such places as offices, meeting and training rooms, libraries, residences, or commercial vehicles, e.g., use of safe work practices with office equipment, avoidance of trips and falls, observance of fire regulations and traffic signals. The work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

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Effective July 2015, pursuant to AB241, each post probationary administrator employed by a school district, except an administrator excluded from any bargaining unit pursuant to NRS 288.170 or a principal, must apply to the superintendent for reappointment to his or her administrative position every 5 years. If an administrator is not reappointed to his or her administrative position pursuant to this section and was previously employed by the school district in another position, the administrator is entitled to be assigned to his or her former position at the rate of compensation provided for that position.

Appendix E



University of Nevada, Reno
775.327.2368 www.unr.edu/research-integrity

Research Integrity
217 Ross Hall / 331,
Reno, Nevada 89557

DATE: December 29, 2021
TO: Jafeth Sanchez
FROM: University of Nevada, Reno Institutional Review Board (IRB)

PROJECT TITLE: [1846856-1] A Comparative Case Study: The Expectations and Experiences of Current and Aspiring Female Secondary Assistant Principals

REFERENCE #: Social Behavioral

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

REVIEW TYPE: Exempt

DECISION DATE: December 29, 2021

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption Category # 2

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An IRB member has reviewed this project and has determined it is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations. Please note, the federal government has identified certain categories of research involving human subjects that qualify for exemption from federal regulations.

Only the IRB has been designated by the University to make a determination that a study is exempt from federal regulations. The above-referenced protocol was reviewed and the research deemed eligible to proceed in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Federal Regulations on the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46.104) and University policy.

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Reviewed Documents

- Advertisement - Recruitment Email Aspiring APs.docx (UPDATED: 12/28/2021)
- Advertisement - Recruitment Email AP.docx (UPDATED: 12/28/2021)
- Consent Form - Information Sheet.docx (UPDATED: 12/28/2021)
- Other - WCSD Research Approval-Broughton_Katherine_102021_102022.pdf (UPDATED: 12/28/2021)
- Other - WCSD Research Application .docx (UPDATED: 12/28/2021)
- Protocol - IRB Protocol.docx (UPDATED: 12/29/2021)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Interview Questions.docx (UPDATED: 12/28/2021)
- University of Nevada, Reno - Part I, Cover Sheet - University of Nevada, Reno - Part I, Cover Sheet (UPDATED: 12/28/2021)

If you have any questions, please contact Nancy Moody at 775.327.2367 or at nmoody@unr.edu.

Sincerely,



Richard Bjur, PhD
Co-Chair, UNR IRB
University of Nevada Reno



Janet Usinger, PhD
Co-Chair, UNR IRB
University of Nevada Reno

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Nevada, Reno IRB's record.