

DISSERTATION

AVOIDING A LOOMING CRISIS: NOVICE LEADER PREPARATION AND RETENTION

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

AVOIDING A LOOMING CRISIS: NOVICE LEADER PREPARATION AND RETENTION

The purpose of this case study was to identify key components, along a continuum of preparation, that school districts and university partners could provide to enhance the support and retention of novice educational leaders in the first three years in their roles. Additionally, the case study identified components missing from an educational administrator licensure program that could be included or addressed to provide a more comprehensive preparation. The research was set within a constructivist, and specifically phenomenological, paradigm. This paradigm provided the understanding that each participant in the study has a different experience and view of the preparation they received through their principal licensure program and how that preparation did, or did not, prepare them for the realities of their first three years in their roles as educational leaders. This case study was explored through focus groups that allowed both the participants and the facilitator to better understand the experiences of each individual involved and co-create an understanding of how future educational leaders can be better prepared and supported as new leaders. Novice leader preparation and retention is an issue requiring a greater level of awareness so that action may be taken to mitigate its unfortunate effects on student outcomes and achievement, staff stability and effectiveness, equity and inclusion, increasingly limited candidate pool, and the career longevity of those seeking to lead our schools in a time of intensifying pressure and complexity.

Keywords: School principals, Burnout, School leadership, Stress, Support, Self-efficacy, Principal retention, Principal selection, Equity leadership, Principal shortage

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DEDICATION

To Shereece, for the support, confidence, and immeasurable sacrifices to keep me and our family afloat throughout this journey.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Louis was a promising and talented educator in his school district. He was hard working, intelligent, and passionate for his work. When he was selected to serve as a new principal in the district, Louis thought it seemed an obvious choice to put both the school and his career on a trajectory for success. However, pressure mounted as declining student achievement, continuing staff conflicts, escalating student behaviors, and increasing levels of parent dissatisfaction. These ongoing issues did not meliorate during Louis's first years as principal; rather, the pace only seemed to accelerate. Within a few short years, Louis was asked to step down from the principalship as these internal and external factors continued to mount against him. What appeared to be the beginning of a very promising career for a hard-working educator sadly resulted in Louis leaving the K-12 educational field. This situation was not only very difficult for the professional involved, but it was traumatic for the school and district community.

Unfortunately, the negative ramifications of an early departure of educational leaders, whether self-selected or decided by supervisors, plays out across educational organizations on a regular basis and moves beyond a single situation to an alarming pattern. Four impact stories, including Louis', are used throughout the paper to offer small glimpses into the very real, and personal consequences associated with the lack of novice leadership development and retention. These impact stories did not comprise the formal case study, yet they are specific examples of actual occurrences. Even though the names and some details were changed in order to maintain confidentiality, the circumstances surrounding the situations are real and accurate.

Statement of the Problem

Louis's story is not uncommon. Although he was a graduate of an accredited and respected principal preparation program, he was not fully prepared for the complexity of his new role. It is naïve for educational systems to believe that novice leaders leaving graduate schools are prepared for the challenges they will face. School leaders in general are experiencing increasing pressure to succeed at high levels of performance from their first months on the job, and that pressure does not slacken as the leader continues in their career. Pressures come from parents, politicians, community groups, social media, direct supervisors, and national regulations and requirements. For the novice leader who is still struggling to grasp the basics of a complicated responsibility, leadership can be overwhelming. Friedman (2002) described the principal's professional world as one characterized by "overwhelming responsibilities, information perplexities, and emotional anxiety" (p. 229). Over time, educational leaders develop burnout as the gap widens between the stressors stemming from their daunting responsibilities and an inability to successfully carry out their role (Friedman, 2002, p. 245). To make the concern that much more acute, they come at a time when superintendents report many teachers in the field are not interested in the overwhelming demands of these positions and are not aspiring to roles as educational leaders (Pounder & Merrill, 2001).

In a 2018 interview, Riley, an associate professor of Educational Leadership at the Australian Catholic University, was quoted regarding principal well-being based on findings during an eight-year longitudinal study: "We're really at a point where we have a looming crisis, I think, in terms of school leadership.... It's virtually become impossible to be a school principal and survive for a long career" (as cited in Robinson, 2018, p.1). Riley's (2018) landmark study identified significant areas of concern regarding stress and burnout in educational leaders. Riley

found that across many criteria the demands of the job are significantly higher than the those found in the work of the general population. The findings also showed significantly higher rates of psychological risk factors, stress, negative interpersonal exchanges, threats and acts of violence, as well as the numbers of hours worked per week (pp. 16–17). These findings correlated with much lower scores on a Quality of Life measure as compared to the general population (p. 16). The pressures may seem insurmountable as novice educational leaders begin their career for, as Mushaandja (2013) noted, novice principals are still dealing with the frustrations of applying the theory learned in their principal licensure programs to the real-world realities of leading a building (p. 54).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify promising practices that school districts and university partners can implement to improve the development and retention of novice educational leaders.

Research Questions

As a currently serving Superintendent of Schools in a traditional, PreK-12 school district for multiple years, one of my main responsibilities has been to identify, hire, train, and support educational leaders. Within my own experience, and those of my peers with whom I have discussed the current state of educational leadership and retention, we note a growing concern that not enough is being done to support leaders, particularly in their first few years on the job. For many of us, those concerns for building and district leaders are magnified as we witness those leaders facing increasingly varied and more difficult challenges with diminishing resources. It has also been a source of concern to see a stream of ongoing openings at the building and district level, while recognizing that the depth and breadth of qualified candidates

appears to be shrinking. The purpose of this study is to identify key components, along a continuum of preparation, that school districts and university partners could provide to enhance the support of educational leaders in the first three years of their new roles. To focus how such supports can better meet the needs of novice educational leaders, the following questions will guide the inquiry:

1. How did graduates of a principal licensure program describe key elements in their preparation to become practicing educational leaders and what did they identify as key elements missing in that preparation?
2. What post-hire supports do graduates of a principal licensure program perceive as important in their first three years in an administrative role?
3. What supports would make a difference for new educational leaders to persist in school leadership?

Delimitations

In order to narrow the scope of the study, data will be collected from two consecutive cohorts of novice educational leaders who participated in a School Leadership Institute (SLI) occurring over two succeeding years. All individuals voluntarily participated in the SLI. The participants in the cohorts were all graduates of an accredited principal licensure program located at a major university in the Intermountain West of the United States.

Significance of the Study

There is a pressing need for change in how we retain and develop effective educational leaders. In their 2013 report, the National Association of Secondary Principals (NASSP) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) asserted that there is

overwhelming evidence of the importance of effective building leaders and stated that, “Great schools do not exist without great leaders” (p. 1). They then stated,

Unfortunately, our priorities have not caught up to the research. Principal development remains a low priority in most educational policy agendas.... With all we know about effective leadership, we can no longer make excuses for inadequate preparation and development. (p. 1)

Principal preparation and retention need to be a focus of ongoing efforts to better meet the needs of an increasingly dynamic responsibility. A study by Goldring et al. (2007) stated, “Finding practical ways to thoughtfully and appropriately assess and develop leaders can have an important impact on the quality of leadership and through that, on the quality of education in our schools” (p. 1). However, emerging research often focuses on the discrete behaviors of effective leaders without providing a connection between the training they received in principal preparation programs and the problems they encounter within their buildings. There is a need to bridge this gap through further study in order to support and retain novice principals in their first years as building leaders. This study was conducted through a phenomenological lens in order to better understand the experiences and needs of those involved in novice leadership positions. This lens illuminates the larger issue of preparation and retention through a focus on the shared experiences of individuals facing the complexities of educational leadership at this time.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of leadership has been a topic of discussion across recorded history and through every strata of society. Some of the world's most ancient texts are in whole, or in part, dedicated to the importance and development of leadership. Today is no different. The importance of leadership development can be measured in many ways, but to use an old adage, let's put our money where our mouth is.

Introduction: Turnover and Retention

A Harvard blog reported in 2013 that there are over 15,000 books in print on leadership today (Shinagel, 2013) with hundreds more added every year; a quick search of Amazon books with the word "leadership" in the title brings up over forty thousand results. In 2019, Forbes reported that leadership training is a \$366 billion global industry with \$166 billion spent annually in the United States alone (Westfall, 2019). Clearly, our dollars show that the field of leadership development is important. However, many would find it hard to believe that states on average spend less than four percent of the federal Title II monies they receive on leadership development for their principals (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 2017, p. 1). This lack of investment in educational leaders is more troublesome when we consider the high rates of turnover and problems with retention currently facing our educational system.

The negative ramifications of regular principal turnover in buildings impact both the leader in question and the larger community with its varied stakeholders. To truly understand the effect of this issue, quantifiable statistics are not enough. It is important to understand the painful, personal experiences of those involved. This paper contains examples that highlight the

realities of novice principal turnover. They represent a failure to prepare and retain educational leaders new to the complex roles they faced. Each of these leaders experienced significant negative effects, both personally and professionally, due to their dismissals or from their own decisions to leave their roles. In each of the buildings touched by these leadership changes, student achievement was negatively affected as was staff morale, turnover, and effectiveness.

The Scope

Multiple respected institutions and researchers have tried to quantify the scope of the problem with educational leadership turnover in the United States. The following studies were conducted independently. Although their numbers differ to some degree, each study demonstrates the issue is significant and needs to be addressed:

- In 2008, the Wallace Foundation reported “the average school experiences changes [*sic*] in principals every three to four years, and this leadership churn can do measurable harm to student achievement” (Mitgang & Gill, 2012, p. 5).
- The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) reported that K-12 principals leaving their jobs each year is estimated at more than 40% (as cited in Johnson, 2005, p. 22).
- The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 2017) reported that one in five K-12 principals working in schools in the 2011-12 school year had left the position by the 2012-13 year (p. 1).
- One out of every two K-12 principals was not retained past their third year as a building leader (NASSP, 2017, p. 1).
- A recent article (School Leadership Network, 2019) highlighted the impact on a number of specific school districts struggling to retain principals:

- Of the principals in the District of Columbia, 64.6% were in their first three years of the principalship with 19% in their very first year.
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools hired new principals for more than a quarter of their schools in one year.
- In Denver Public Schools, 34 of their 185 schools had three or more principals over the course of a nine-year period.
- Researchers reported that across the United States, districts faced leadership turnover rates as high as 15% to 30% each year (NASSP, 2017, p. 1).
- School Leadership Network (2014) reported that 25,000, or one quarter of the K-12 principals in the United States, leave their schools each year (p.1). Their conservative estimate is that if principal retention across the United States were improved to a more manageable level, as seen in affluent school districts, it would save districts \$163 million annually (p.4).
- Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) reported that each year, one-fifth of the nation's principals leave their jobs, representing 18,000 vacancies in K-12 buildings which the authors called an "unsustainable level" (p. 1).

These stark numbers represent the looming crisis referred to by Riley (Robinson, 2018, p.1). These high rates of turnover in educational leadership warrant further examination; however, in order to address the issue, it is necessary to understand the root causes.

Causes

As in most complex issues, there are often many antecedents to an issue. The problem of leadership turnover and retention also has multiple root causes, but a review of the literature narrows the focus. Although there is currently a relatively small amount of literature in regards to

novice leadership turnover in education, what was available pointed to three predominant causes why a new principal either resigns or is removed from their role. These three issues are stress and burnout, a lack of adequate preparation, and minimal ongoing support.

Stress and Burnout

The term “burnout” was first used in the 1970s and was later described as a type of job stress by Maslach and Jackson (1981). Maslach (2003) further refined job burnout by describing it as “a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to stressors in the workplace. Specifically, it involves the chronic strain that results from an incongruence, or misfit, between the worker and the job” (p.189). Burnout has also been defined by psychologists as a response to chronic emotional strain caused by dealing with the needs of other people (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Beusaert et al. (2016) clarified the term and explained how it manifests itself, saying that burnout is,

a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do “people work” of some kind. Emotional exhaustion entails a lack in energy. Depersonalization refers to a detached attitude towards the job itself and/or the colleagues, sub-and super-ordinates. Reduced personal accomplishment indicates a decrease in feelings of achievement and competence. (pp. 349-350)

Sosyal et al. (2013) explained that for school administrators who are experiencing burnout, it manifests itself in multiple ways:

A person with occupational burnout feels alienated, emotionally worn out, inefficient, useless, ordinary, and unsuccessful. In such a negative state of mind, it is hard for people to fulfill the professional duties they are expected to meet on a daily basis. (p. 4)

The issue of stressors and burnout is significant across the United States. NAESP reported, “As many as 75 percent of principals experience stress-related symptoms that can affect their physical, emotional, and mental health” (as cited in Queen & Schumacher, 2006, p. 18).

Educational leaders develop burnout as a widening gap is formed between the stressors stemming from their overwhelming responsibilities and an inability to successfully carry out their role (Friedman, 2002, p. 245). Friedman (2002) identified one cause of burnout as when an administrator,

without adequate preparation for adaptation to school reality, enters a highly complex world demanding rapid response to many varied, often conflicting demands. At some point, principals learn that they cannot possibly live up to their own performance expectations regarding various tasks. They become frustrated, exhausted, and feel unaccomplished, in other words, burned-out. (p. 230)

NASSP and NAESP (2013) cited the main reasons leaders voluntarily left the principalship as the following: (a) a discrepancy between high levels of accountability and their actual ability to influence change, (b) a sense of being isolated as they dealt with challenges, (c) a workload that is undoable, and (d) preservice training that did not adequately prepare them for the actual challenges of the job (p. 6). A study by Friedman (2002) indicated that a demanding work setting with a lack of support and resources led to stress. Novice leaders may work to mitigate stress and care for themselves, but the contrast between the developmental stage of their skill-sets and the overwhelming demands and stressors of their positions are significant enough that for many, “burnout may be the endpoint in unsuccessful coping” (Beausaert et al., 2016, p. 298).

A landmark study conducted by Riley (2018) identified significant areas of concern with stress and burnout in educational leaders. The longitudinal study was conducted over eight years with data collection from 5,934 school leaders representing ~50% of all principals in Australia.

Some significant findings included:

- Principals experienced high levels of job demands (1.5 times the general population), emotional demands (1.7 times), and emotional labor (1.7 times) being the highest demands when compared to the general population. This was correlated with higher

levels of burnout (1.6 times), stress symptoms (1.7 times), difficulty sleeping (2.2 times), cognitive stress (1.5 times), somatic symptoms (1.3 times), and, depressive symptoms (1.3 times; p. 16).

- Of those studied, 31.24% of respondents received a “red flag” indicating they had either reported thoughts of self-harm in the week prior to the survey, had a score significantly low in a Quality of Life measure, or a composite psychological risk score in the high or very high category (p. 16). This was up from 10% of respondents compared to the 2016 report.
- Since 2015, there was a concerning upward trend in stress caused by sheer quantity of work and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning (p. 16).
- Since 2015, administrators reported significant worries regarding the mental health issues of students, mental health issues of staff, and teacher shortages (p.17).
- Principals experienced a substantially higher prevalence of offensive behavior at work with adult-adult bullying rising 4.4 times higher than the general population (p. 17).
- Forty-five percent of educational leaders received a threat of violence in 2018, with 37% of respondents indicating having had at least one act of physical violence against them (p. 17).
- On average, 53% of principals worked more than 56 hours a week with ~24% working upwards of 61-65 hours each week, and ~40% of these educational leaders worked upwards of 25 hours a week during school holidays. The latter number was almost double what was reported in the 2016 survey (p. 14).
- Work-family conflict occurred at nearly double the rate of the general population (p. 32).

These staggering numbers help to quantify the stress and burnout in educational leaders. However, in many educational environments, few resources are allocated to supporting principal well-being even though research indicates that every dollar spent on effective workplace mental health initiatives could generate \$2.30 in a return on investment (PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia, 2014, p. 5). Stress and burnout alone are enough for the educational field to require significant changes if it is going to create and retain a pipeline of effective leaders. Yet, when these factors are coupled with insufficient preparation, professional development, and support, a system is created that becomes untenable for many educational leaders.

Impact: Juliana—Stress. Juliana was likely the most well-read and best-spoken administrator in the entire district. She had a passion for learning new things and experimenting with ideas in her building. She had a unique talent for helping the most difficult teachers on a staff find new places to work outside of education and she accepted the fact that not everyone would approve of her decisions. She wanted to do what was right for her students and the remaining staff. As a newly hired principal, she hit the ground running and made initial inroads with parents and staff through regular and transparent communication, something that had not been a practice of the previous administrator. Juliana's first couple of months on the job burned bright and hot. Everyone thought they had found the person to lead the building forward. However, it quickly became apparent that for all the great ideas and understanding of educational theory, Juliana had a difficult time scaffolding the work and getting things done. With time, it was felt by many that she was "all talk and no action." Juliana had a desire to get the work done, but she struggled with the implementation. The superintendent knew, from multiple sources, what was taking place but perhaps not how to support Juliana. Opposition mounted both internally and externally. At the time the district had two very experienced principals with years

of understanding around the very systems that would have helped Juliana transform how she worked and helped her find success. Sadly, no plans were made to provide direct supervisory support or a mentoring program to help. Under a great deal of pressure, her performance continued to erode and concerning behaviors started manifesting themselves that had not been a previous part of her character, until she made a series of disreputable choices that likely would not have occurred otherwise. Juliana was promptly dismissed from the position.

The leadership issues inherent in Juliana's situation were apparent to her supervisor early in her new role. As her tenure went on, Juliana became more and more stressed as she grasped the disconnect between what she should be accomplishing versus the reality of her situation. Friedman's (2000) research found that when principals did not realize meaningful levels of professional success as leaders and managers, they doubted their own abilities; furthermore, principals' sense of their lack of accomplishment raised their stress. Without proper supports, burnout and aloofness (Friedman, 1995, p. 197) is likely to occur. Friedman (2002) further defined burnout as commonly related to "unmediated stress – and a sense of lacking buffers and support systems" (p. 230). In a 2011 report, Phillips and Sen made a concise statement based on their research into the effects of a stressed- and burned-out leader on their buildings: "If good leadership is at the heart of every good school, then a leader who is both mentally and physically unwell could have a potentially disastrous impact on the well-being of a school and those within it" (p. 180).

Lack of Professional Development and Learning

When contemplating the retention of educational leaders, important questions to consider are (a) how well programs prepare new leaders to meet the demands of today's educational environment, and (b) is the current state of on-going professional development allocated to new

leaders sufficient to meet the challenges they face? Educational organizations and researchers have identified many key roles of building leaders: educational visionary, curriculum leader, assessment expert, disciplinarian, community builder, technology leader, resource manager, public relations expert who brokers the interests of students, parents, staff, law makers, and the larger community; budget analyst; facility manager; special program administrator; administrator of contractual, legal, and policy mandates; personnel manager who hires, fires, provides professional development, and guides teaching; communicator and networker with external partners and parents; provider of a safe and positive school environment; manager of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities; partner to parent associations and teacher unions; overseer of student health and wellness; and all the while, the building leader is in charge of improving school outcomes (Beausaert et al., 2016; NASSP & NAESP, 2013; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Sincar, 2013; Lemoine et al., 2018). In one single meta-analysis, Marzano et al. (2005) specifically called out 21 specific behaviors of school leaders that have direct correlation with improved student achievement (pp. 41-64).

With such a diverse field of critical responsibilities, we should be reminded that “on average, states spend less than four percent of federal Title II dollars on principal professional development activities [and] with several states opting to make no investment at all” (NASSP, 2017, p. 1). This is especially shocking because research demonstrated that building leadership is second only to the teachers in improving student performance (NASSP & NAESP, 2013, p. 2). The Wallace Foundation (2008) observed, “Half-hearted or poorly funded efforts to support principals at any stage of their career-long development are likely to fall short if the goal is to prepare leaders who can significantly enhance teaching and learning” (p. 8). Similar to ongoing professional development for educational leaders, university-based principal preparation

programs have significant issues to address as well. Mitgang and Gill (2012) reported few of the 500 programs have kept up with the evolving role of the principalship. They identified flaws that included:

Curricula that fail to take into account the needs of districts and diverse student bodies; weak connections between theory and practice; faculty with little or no experience as school leaders; and internships that are poorly designed and insufficiently connected to the rest of the curriculum and lack of opportunities to experience real leadership. (p. 6)

With significant concerns about pre-service and ongoing support for educational leaders, particularly those in their first years, what can be done to address the “looming crisis” (Riley as cited in Robinson, 2018, p. 1)?

Problems Downstream

The turnover of novice educational leaders associated with stress, burnout, and lack of ongoing professional development causes a significant disruption in the personal lives of those who are dismissed or leave the profession; however, the toll is significantly higher as these rates of turnover create even larger problems downstream. In a discussion with other educators at a leadership retreat, an elementary school principal referred to the importance of the principalship:

We need to continue to fill this profession with high-quality people who have the right “why” in place. And if there are people coming out of [a] program who don’t feel like they have that support, they are not going to sustain it for the 10, 15, 20 years that our schools need and so I think there’s a real compelling need, not just in our [state], but in our national community to really empower and support the field of education. And frankly, the principal role doesn’t get nearly as much attention as the teacher role and it’s very important and vital role in sustaining the culture, and the health of the school, and then, in turn, the community.

Without educational leaders who are prepared to move systems forward and have the support they need, schools and districts will not realize their goals of making improvements across a wide array of challenging issues. The importance of effective educational leadership at the building level is significant and has an effect on multiple outcomes. The negative effects of

continued leadership turnover in our schools have ramifications on student outcomes and achievement, on staff stability and effectiveness, on equity and inclusion, and on the increasingly limited candidate pool. To achieve the schools we need, these issues need to be systematically addressed, and retaining new leaders will be a key component of the necessary changes.

Student Outcomes and Achievement

In a joint report, NASSP and NAESP (2013) referenced research that demonstrated no cases of a school turnaround without a strong educational leader (p. 3). NAESP and NASSP's report further referenced a six-year study by Louis et al. (2010) involving data from 180 schools across nine states that showed leadership was second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning (p. 2). Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) acknowledged the contributions of all participants in school reform, but they highlighted the importance of leadership by stating, "School reform is a highly collaborative process – it does not work to cast the principal in the role of hero. But there is no doubt that effective principal leadership is an indispensable component of transformation" (p. i). They also reported that schools with the highest number of principals over the previous 10 years also manifested the weakest school cultures and curriculum as well as the lowest student achievement (p. 5). In an analysis of longitudinal data covering 400 schools and 352,000 students of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Florida, the fourth largest school district in the nation, Béteille et al. (2011) found, "The departure of a principal is associated with . . . lower student achievement gains" (p. 2).

In a substantial study, Waters et al. (2004) found a significant correlation between a building's instructional leader and student achievement. These results were part of an extensive meta-analysis involving 69 studies, 2,802 schools, nearly 1.4 million students, and 14,00 teachers. They quantified this correlation as "one standard deviation improvement in leadership

practices is associated with an increase in average student achievement from the 50th percentile to the 60th percentile” (pp. 2-3). Marzano et al. (2005) further clarified these findings by explaining that an average principal (50th percentile) assigned to an average building (50th percentile) would continue to realize average results in student outcomes. However, if that principal received training that increased their leadership effectiveness by one standard deviation, that same building would go from the 50th percentile to the 60th percentile in average student achievement. This is a significant finding; an increase in a novice leader’s ability has a profound and measurable impact on student outcomes. It is imperative that resources are provided for novice leaders to perform well in their new assignment and gain proficiency in their roles as instructional leaders. This would help reduce the negative impact of leadership turnover on student outcomes and achievement.

The correlation between effective leadership and positive student achievement is not reserved exclusively for the building level. Marzano and Waters (2009) conducted a meta-analysis that included data from 1,220 school districts over a 35-year period. They found that they could predict a 10-point percentile gain in student academic achievement based on the effectiveness of district leadership. Whether at the building or district level, effective leadership has a significant impact on student outcomes. The development and support of novice instructional leaders at both the school and district levels need to be addressed in order to realize continued improvements in student learning.

Staff Stability and Effectiveness

The significance of effective educational leadership goes well beyond the impact on student outcomes. A Wallace Foundation report authored by Mitgang and Gill (2012) quoted Darling-Hammond, a Stanford University scholar and advocate for national education reform:

It is the work [educational leaders] do that enables teachers to be effective – as it is not just the traits that teachers bring, but their ability to use what they know in a high-functioning organization, that produces student success. And it is the leader who both recruits and retains high quality staff – indeed, *the number one reason for teacher’s decision about whether to stay in a school is the quality of the administrative support* [emphasis added] – and it is the leader who must develop this organization. (p. 3)

In the previously mentioned longitudinal study conducted in the Miami-Dade School District, Béteille et al. (2011) found, “The departure of a principal is associated with higher teacher turnover rates” (p. 2). Further, Béteille et al. found that teacher turnover was not dependent on if the new principal was novice or had years of previous principal experience. They stated, “These results suggest that leadership instability tends to generate greater instability among the teaching force that goes beyond the turnover associated with having a less experienced principal” (p. 17). These studies demonstrate the negative effect of turnover amongst educational leaders on staff stability.

Equity and Inclusion

The report by Béteille et al. (2011) demonstrated the rates of leadership turnover were often highest in schools with our most vulnerable populations: low-income, minority, and low-achieving student populations (p. 20). Béteille et al. stated, “The negative relationship between principal turnover and student achievement is stronger in failing schools and in high poverty schools” (p. 20). In these schools, students have reading and math scores .04 to .06 standard deviations lower in years they experience principal turnover. Béteille et al. then reported that instability in school leadership is “more consequential for high poverty and failing schools, schools which also tend to have more frequent turnover” (p. 20). In the report by School Leadership Network (2019) indicating that in Denver Public Schools, 34 of their 185 schools had three or more principals over the course of a nine-year period, they added additional details that these 34 schools were amongst those who served students with the highest needs and that this

turnover had negative consequences on student achievement, school culture, and teacher retention (p.1). These findings have significant ramifications on equity and inclusion because school turn around only occurs with strong educational leadership.

This “looming crisis” (Riley as cited in Robinson, 2018, p. 1) has a disproportionately larger impact on disenfranchised groups and further perpetuates a system of inequity. Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) studied five California high schools that had overcome the odds in supporting the success of low-income students of color. Their focus was to look for design features and policies that could be replicated in order to promote exceptional, equitable high schools on a broad scale. Their findings included the need to recruit, support, and provide mentoring internships to dynamic leaders that reflect today’s students (p. 20). This will be an important step to address in K-12 systems if we are to dismantle inequities. Referring to the schools that are successfully meeting the needs of low-income students of color, Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender stated, “Unless policy systems change, however, these schools will remain anomalies rather than harbingers of the future” (p. 21).

Increasingly Limited Candidate Pool

A growing concern is that increased rates of turnover and decreasing numbers of quality candidates to fill newly opened positions will continue to exacerbate the situation. This is not a new problem and has been a concern for many years. Pounder and Merrill (2001) reported,

There is a shortage of qualified candidates for principal vacancies in the U.S. About half of the surveyed districts reported that there was a shortage of qualified candidates for the principal positions they had attempted to fill. This shortage has occurred among all types of schools (rural, urban, suburban) and among all levels of vacancies (elementary, junior/middle, and high school). (p. 27)

In 2002, Reeves explained that the problem was becoming worse and that 10% of leadership vacancies were being filled with temporary personnel due to a lack of qualified candidates (p.

159). Concern regarding qualified leader shortages in education has spanned many years and across multiple national systems (Barty et al., 2005; Goldstein, 2001; Lemoine et al., 2018; Mathis, 2012; Paton, 2011; Topsfield, 2012;). Recently, De La Rosa (2020) added another complicating factor to the equation by reporting that over 27% of current principals are over the age of 65. In a season of stress and health risks due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we could be facing an even greater turnover as seasoned principals choose to retire and thus open more principal vacancies. This comes at a time when NASSP (2017) had already reported that the need for principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels will increase six percent due to population growth by the year 2022 (p. 2).

A *New York Times* article reported that as the Obama administration looked to change principals in failing schools, but there were not enough qualified principals to fill the positions needed (Dillon, 2011). Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, was quoted as saying, “This was a human capital problem – these people don’t grow on trees” (Dillon, 2011, p. 9). Lemoine et al. (2018) reported, “Notwithstanding the importance of the school principal, a global crisis faces public schools: a distressing shortage of principals who are willing and qualified to meet the current and future needs of public-school students” (pp. 17-18).

Promising Practices

As there are multiple antecedents to the causes of novice leader turnover and retention, current literature also provides some promising practices that could be used to lessen the rates of turnover and support more leaders through their first years on the job. However, this literature was not as robust when studying leaders as it was in studying teacher turnover. The promising practices from the literature indicated that changes in how school districts and universities partner together could meliorate high turnover rates and provide a solid base from which new

leaders can establish a successful career with greater longevity and higher levels of personal satisfaction. The promising practices include: improvement of preparation programs, creation of collegial networks, and post hire learning.

Improvement of Preparation Programs

The Wallace Foundation released a report by Mitgang and Gill in 2012 titled, *The Making of the Principal: Five Lessons in Leadership Training* that provided direction for districts and universities looking to improve leadership preparation. The report outlined program components they considered essential for leaders facing the realities of today's educational challenges. One recommendation was that preparation needs to go beyond merely teaching how to manage a building; it needs to prepare those leaders to lead improved instruction and school change. This can be accomplished if preservice curricula are focused on the art of coaching teachers, data proficiency, planning meaningful professional development, communicating both internally and externally to stakeholders, and understanding how to use systems thinking to address problems and to master collaborative processes. Recommendations also included coursework that moves students from theory to practice and meaningful, well-designed internship experiences.

Hitt et al. (2012) recommended changes to educational leadership preservice programs by first, having a more robust system for recruiting and selecting the right candidates. This point was reinforced by two substantial reports (Barber et al., 2007; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011) concluding that the creation of a pipeline of teachers prepared for future educational leadership needed to be a well thought out process. This process included systematic candidate preparation and recommendation rather than the most common pattern where a majority of candidates simply self-select and enroll in a university program (Barber et al., 2007; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). Hitt et al. (2012) advocated that after getting the right people into these leadership

preservice programs, the next step for meaningful improvement was to focus on a structure and delivery model that focused on (a) the use of social support networks; (b) continual cycles of assessment and feedback; (c) “challenging, relevant and standards-based curriculum”; and (d) improved field-based experiences (p. 2). The right people with the right training will be a significant step forward as districts seek to improve learning while supporting and retaining educational leaders.

Another set of themes found across the literature in relation to leadership preparation programs are actually two branches of the same problem (Beam et al., 2016; Mushaandja, 2013). One theme identifies that while candidates are in leadership preparation programs, they are not able to truly anticipate the types of challenges that lay before them as novice educational leaders. As such, they are not able to hone in on specific learning that will be the most beneficial to their preparation. Putting theory into practice becomes a daunting challenge. The second worrisome theme is that many faculty who are preparing these novice leaders have been out of school leadership positions for many years—even decades—and they likely do not understand the different challenges and pressures now facing today’s novice leaders. These two themes come from the same problem: a need for better, more current situational awareness of the requisite skills of educational leaders and for licensure programs to regularly adjust according to evolving skill sets.

However, to be fair to university preparation programs, it is important to note that of the dozens of roles and characteristics previously identified and listed as requirements for educational leaders, it would not be possible for a principal licensure program to provide adequate training that addressed such an expansive set of needs. In fact, multiple university-level courses would be required for any one of those skillsets to move the candidate toward

proficiency. Schmoker (2016) advocated for the need to “simplify” and “demystify” school leadership by stating:

If we want to bring effective instructional leadership within the reach of all school leaders, we must give leaders permission to focus their limited time and energy on the core of good schooling: a widely acknowledged, empirically established set of fairly obvious practices that have the most direct effect on the quality of education. (p. 5)

Beam et al. (2016) acknowledged that not only are evaluations and adjustments to leadership preparation programs needed to help its graduates, formal and informal collegial networks and ongoing post-hire leadership development are needed.

Collegial Networks

Many are familiar with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs published in 1967. According to this hierarchy, a person’s sense of belonging is fundamental to meet their psychological and safety needs. Tomic and Tomic (2008) also highlighted the need, particularly in many modern societies, for more social support. They stated, “Social cohesion has been replaced by individualism . . . [that] brings with it cultural isolation and loss of identity” (p. 7). Support networks may be increasingly important as society increasingly shifts away from interpersonal relationships. Celoria and Roberson (2015) found new principals needed a support system that allowed them a safe place, through supporting relationships with experienced colleagues, to deal with the stress and isolation inherent in their roles as educational leaders. Sosyal et al. (2013) defined social support as the following:

A complex, emotional, functional and social network of relationships. Being in many forms, such as emotional support of an important person, a friend to talk to or get consulted about work related issues. . . . Social support can help people to increase their life quality through a satisfaction driven from these relationships. (p. 6)

Sosyal et al. further reported that social support has a mediating effect on burnout (p. 6), concluding that “low perceived social supports correspond with higher burnout rates” (p. 13).

The use of cohorts and networks is an effective key to successful leadership preparation and the continued support of a leader after being hired. These networks can provide the social support vital to new leaders as they attempt to lead a school community while they learn to be a principal. A white paper prepared for the National Policy Board for Educational Administration stated, “Cohorts begin as an assembly of individuals, but through the navigating of shared experiences, peer support and trust is [*sic*] often built and a community of learners and practitioners emerge” (Hitt et al., 2012, p. 6). Mitgang and Gill (2012) stated, “Exemplary programs often group participants in cohorts that allow them to grow together, share experiences and support each other even after they are hired as leaders” (p. 11). This recommendation is in line with one made by Reeves (2002) who advocated for leadership training programs that are seen as an “investment in the future” and move beyond traditional practices to more reflection among professional colleagues (p. 160). Support networks are important for educational leaders in their day-to-day work. Hitt et al. (2012) recommended ongoing networks for educational leaders after they have taken leadership positions in order to enrich their ongoing professional development and provide support (p. 12).

Research done by Beausaert et al. (2016) reported significant findings for supporting principals through stress and burnout. Beausaert et al. found that burnout in principals could be predicted based on how those educational leaders perceived the social support they received from their colleagues. Beausaert et al. wrote, “When principals lack or lose social support from colleagues, they will be more likely to burnout over time” (p. 359). Their findings also suggested support networks served to buffer burnout over time with recommendations to create principal support networks in order to decrease stress and burnout.

The literature on this topic indicated that formal and informal collegial networks are important support for novice leaders. Although this is both an effective and inexpensive support that school districts can provide, it is not a common practice across all districts. Beam et al. (2016) highlighted a concern when a district is not taking the lead in providing these networks. Their research showed that many struggling novice leaders would not reach out to a supervisor to ask for these supports because they were “fearful this might be interpreted as a sign of weakness and might jeopardize their new position” (p. 152). A district that is proactive in providing formal and informal collegial networks would be doing a significant service to their novice leaders by removing a potential barrier to supports.

Post-Hire Learning

Research by Federici and Skaalvik (2012) indicated self-efficacy in a principal’s role decreases burnout and motivation to quit the job while increasing job satisfaction. The Wallace Foundation report by Mitgang and Gill (2012) highlighted a significant concern of only focusing on pre-service learning, quoting a new principal as saying, “No matter what preparation anyone has, being the principal is not the same. Nothing prepares you for the job” (Mitgang & Gill, 2012, p. 24). NAESP (2013) reported that effective educational leaders combine the skills of both instructional leadership with building and staff management; however, a leader cannot effectively learn these skills without having a building to lead. The importance of on-the-job training continues to be a need amongst novice educational leaders. Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) point out that districts need to consider this training in a manner similar to many successful businesses. These businesses understand that only about 20% of leadership development is able to occur through formalized programs and that the other 80% is learned on

the job and through life experience. This line of thinking would lead districts and university partners to explore more robust post-hire learning and training supports.

School districts need to establish supports for novice educational leaders that go beyond traditional induction programs to increase self-efficacy. Learning and support must be available for educational leaders to continue their progression post-hire in a manner that allows for the development of instructional, building, and staff leadership skills. In discussing professional development, Fullan (2008) stated that even if a program or course is a good one, if learning does not take place within the context of the actual work, “at best [it] represents[s] useful input, but only that” (p. 86). Fullan advocated that professional learning must occur through meaningful, reflective action (p. 89). True reflective action for novice leaders needs to occur in the context of their new environment, roles, and responsibilities.

Most leaders in new roles, however, receive very little support. Beam et al. (2016) reported that one in five novice principals stated that they lacked support from their supervisors (p. 152), and a majority of those who participated in the study indicated a lack of preparation for their leadership roles and a desire for supports such as mentoring programs (p. 158). Among the most significant findings of this research in supporting and retaining novice leaders was the need for applying theory into practice, guiding time and task management, and supporting formal and informal mentors and cohorts. Beam et al. summarized that among the various challenges they studied surrounding novice principals, “the prevailing thread throughout was the need for support” (p. 159). The participants in the study acknowledged that even with changes to leadership preparation programs, the most significant support they could receive to face the challenges as novice leaders would be through on-the-job trainings and support (p. 158). A report by Cieminski (2018) reinforced those findings by demonstrating that in districts with high

principal retention rates, an important key to their success was providing focused and individualized supports to novice leaders.

Impact: James—Lack of Feedback and Targeted Support. James joined a new district after many years in the classroom and a solid run as an assistant principal (AP) in a larger, neighboring K-12 system. He was hired to fill an important instructional position at the district office and was excited for a new opportunity to learn and grow. After a couple of years in his new district, issues at an existing high school necessitated a change of principal for the third time in a few short years. This change needed to be made, and even though the string of administrators being replaced had years of principal experience, their own shortcomings and the difficult dynamics from years of ineffective leadership had caused issues in desperate need of attention. The superintendent did not want to bring in a new principal unfamiliar with the district and this high school's problems. James was asked to take the role. Although this transfer seemed logical considering James's AP experience at the high school level and familiarity with the district over the last few years, he had some trepidation due to the difficulty of some situations in the building. He took the newly offered position but quickly seemed to struggle. Decisions made for the building often looked ill-planned and regularly appeared to set the building back even further. Although a confident and charismatic person, James struggled to build relationships with students, staff, and parents. Over the course of two years, he received no additional supports. He continued to sink. Regular complaints came from varying stakeholders, including the board of education, which arrived at the superintendent's desk. After an unnerving conversation with the

superintendent, James, who had wanted to work for a few more years, decided he would leave education and retire.

Although James was an experienced educator and had leadership experience before becoming a novice principal, the increased demands of his new role required point-of-need supports that went beyond his principal licensure preparation and years of experience as an AP. NAESP (2013) recommended ongoing support for leadership development that includes (a) coaching, (b) a cohort approach to problem solving, (c) targeted training to deal with individual needs, and (d) opportunities for reflection and renewal (p. 10). NASSP (2017) had similar recommendations for the development of practicing leaders as school districts and universities collaborate on programs that include coaching, mentoring, and residency programs. Hitt et al. (2012) advised in-service professional development be granted proper time in order to have high-quality, personalized learning that is assessed and adjusted to meet the needs of practicing leaders. Hitt et al.'s research also recommended off-site learning to "broaden thinking by expanding the range of possibilities and providing space for reflection and discussion of new ideas" (pp. 10-11). Although the exception rather than the rule, there are school districts that have successfully run programs that have improved the effectiveness and retention of novice leaders. Barber et al. (2007) highlighted such a program in the Boston school district that included pre-service preparation in the form of a fellowship program, followed by very focused post-hire supports and ongoing professional development (p. 34). This type of attention to the needs of novice educational leaders is possible and research continues to demonstrate the need to greatly increase the time, attention, and resources being provided to support practicing educational leaders in ways that sustain them in the day-to-day practices of building and staff management while increasing the efficacy of instructional leadership.

Lapses in the Literature

A review of the literature indicated significant concerns for both pre-service and ongoing support for educational leaders, particularly those in their first years on the job. Considerable research has been conducted on teacher burnout, preparation and support, but fewer studies have focused on educational leadership in the same areas. Although research exists in relation to educational leadership preparation programs, further study is needed regarding the components and development of successful leadership pipelines. Research by Hitt et al. (2012) and Pounder and Merrill (2001) provides initial starting points for how universities and school districts can partner on successful leadership development. Even less research has been conducted in reference to post-hire support and burnout. This remains a field of study in need of significant attention if we are to understand the needs of novice educational leaders and how they can best be supported and retained in their crucial responsibilities.

Summary

Riley (2018) stated, “Principals, deputy/assistant principals and teachers are [the country’s] nation builders. They need to be well resourced, not just logistically, but also symbolically, emotionally, and intellectually” (p. 29). The role of an educational leader in K-12 public education systems continues to become progressively more dynamic with increasing demands. It is imperative that school districts and university partners provide a continuum of support for leaders new to these responsibilities. This review indicated key components of these measures should include the improvement of leadership preparation programs, ready to access support networks, and ongoing, focused professional learning opportunities. DeVita (2009) wrote, “The bottom line is that investments in good principals are a particularly cost-effective way to improve teaching and learning” (pp. 3-4). Not only will this investment help produce

more effective educational leaders better prepared to meet the realities of today's educational environment, it could reduce burnout and turnover and possibly avoid a "looming crisis" (Riley as cited in Robinson, 2018, p. 1).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This “looming crisis” on the horizon of a lack of well-prepared and skilled educational leaders will seriously affect the condition of education in the United States. In order to better inform school districts and colleges on how to create a sustainable leadership pipeline, studies need to be conducted that provide an increased awareness of the shared understanding of educators in their first three years as leaders. This shared understanding will provide key decision makers vital information to making informed decisions that better support the development and retention of educational leaders.

Theoretical Constructs

In order to create a shared understanding, this study was conducted through a qualitative approach based on constructivist epistemology and phenomenological methodology. The research strategy consisted of a field study conducted with educators in their first three years as leaders who participated in a leadership institute housed at a major university located in the Intermountain West. Data collection occurred over the course of two years through the use of focus groups.

The following research questions guided the inquiry:

1. How did graduates of a principal licensure program describe key elements in their preparation to become practicing educational leaders and what did they identify as key elements missing in that preparation?
2. What post-hire supports do graduates of a principal licensure program perceive as important in their first three years in an administrative role?

3. What supports would make a difference for new educational leaders to persist in school leadership?

Qualitative

Although both quantitative and qualitative scientific research methods seek to answer questions through the use of systematic procedures, collection of evidence, and methods resulting in findings that advance understanding, qualitative research has characteristics uniquely designed to study the preparation and needs of new educational leaders in this context. A quantitative study can measure the magnitude of an issue, but it is not situated to understand the whole: its various parts, the similarities and differences from other things, context, outcomes, or the significance of what is being studied compared to qualitative research that is designed to understand these dynamics (Wertz et al., 2011, p.1). Glesne (2016) stated, “Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of actions and narratives, and the ways in which they intersect” (p. 1). Qualitative research works toward understanding the “human” side of a question through the contextual understanding of those individuals involved. Context provides additional understanding, depth, and complexity to the area of study through an exploration of the relationships, emotions, behaviors, opinions and beliefs of the participants involved in the issue.

Constructivist

The epistemology of constructivist inquiry is one of transactional, co-created findings. Constructivist inquiry seeks to elicit the experience, learning, and understanding of participants to find substantial consensus in order to construct new knowledge and improve practice. Guba (1990) postulated that knowledge is a human construction and as such, it is never certifiable; rather, truth and meaning are created by one’s interactions and experiences (p. 26). Bazeley stated that constructivists work from “the premise that knowledge is constructed through

discourse in the context of individual histories and social interactions” (p. 23). Hence, this qualitative research study was set within a constructivist paradigm with the understanding that each of the participants had a different direct experience and view of the preparation they received through the principal licensure program and how that preparation did, or did not, prepare them for the realities of their first three years as educational leaders in their current roles. As an educational leader in the role of Superintendent of Schools, I am tasked with developing and retaining leaders; therefore, my purpose in this study was to gather knowledge that will improve practice and transform action and policy. The purpose of improved practice is a desired outcome of constructivist theory, as outlined by Guba, Lincoln, and Lynham (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Phenomenology

Phenomenological study is an approach within qualitative research and the constructivist paradigm to understand a particular phenomenon through the direct experiences of those involved. Merriam (2002) wrote, “The defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on describing the ‘essence’ of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it” (p. 93). In order to do so, Van der Mescht (1999) stated that the researcher’s task is “to enter the dialogue, and eavesdrop, as it were; to listen in, and capture the essence of what is perceived by the subject” (p. 3). The continued focus on the shared experiences of the participants results in a constructed understanding “coalescing around consensus” (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 290). Phenomenological research goes beyond simply measuring the magnitude of an issue. As Wertz et al. (2011) stated, it “investigates *what* is experienced and *how* it is experienced” (p. 124). Glesne (2016) further explained this research as an “in-depth inquiry into a topic with a small number of homogeneous participants. The researcher seeks to understand the

experiences and perceptions of each participant, and to examine similarities and differences across cases” (p. 290). A phenomenological inquiry into the preparation experience of educational leaders provides an opportunity to understand the phenomena through co-understanding within the situational context and was well suited for this particular study.

Case Study

An important qualitative research approach is the case study. Glesne (2016) defined this research method as “an intensive study over time of an individual, institution, organization, or some bounded group, place, or process” (p. 295). The process includes data gathering, interviewing, and analysis to investigate “a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Glesne, 2016, p. 290). In explaining the importance of the case study, Bazeley (2013) stated:

It is not that we can describe the characteristics of a larger population, survey style, but rather that we gain understanding of the way some aspect of society works – an understanding of processes and principles, theory rather than facts. Such theory might then be applied, with appropriate modifications to take account of variations in context, to a new setting within that society, or perhaps even more widely. The single case allows also for qualitative exploration of process and causality that is foundational to casual generalizations. (p. 410)

The case study in this instance was designed to research the effectiveness of the Colorado State University Principal Licensure program in preparing and supporting graduates in their first three years as educational leaders. This was done through focus group interviews of program graduates, the bounded group, to better understand their lived experience.

Focus Group

Discussion through a focus group was chosen as a data collection technique as it allowed both the participants and the facilitator to better understand the lived experiences of each individual involved and co-create an understanding of how future educational leaders can be better prepared and supported as new leaders. Guba (1990) stated that the point of the interaction

between others, such as facilitator and participants, is to have an “increased awareness and appreciation (not necessarily acceptance) of the constructions of other stakeholders” (p. 72). Guba further explained that reality is a social construct (p. 77). As such, a group dialogue is a particularly effective way to identify the reality of the participants shared experience within the preparatory program. Heron and Reason (1997) explained that the methodology of constructivist research is dialectical in nature, which is the essence of a semi-structured conversation with participants (p. 289). The epistemology of constructivist research is that truth and meaning are created by our interactions with the world. Ultimately, the aim of the focus group was to understand lived experiences that will inform and improve practice.

Methodology

The research followed a methodology that included a literature review, case study, and focus groups.

Literature Review

To better inform my research, I conducted a review of existing literature that began with a search of key words: school principals, burnout, school leadership, stress, support, and self-efficacy. As I reviewed research identified through these key words, as well as returning to previous readings I had found throughout my doctorate program, I identified additional research referenced in these studies that expanded my reading list. When an article was identified that might be of interest, I conducted a staged review that included an initial reading of the abstract followed by a more in-depth reading of the methods and findings if the research appeared to have content that matched my field of study. If the research merited further analysis, the entire paper was read and incorporated into an outline for this paper.

My review of existing literature identified a significant body of research focused on the causes of burnout and recommendation of solutions for teachers, but educational leader burnout is an emerging area of research. Currently, much of the literature regarding leader burnout is anecdotal in nature and most often found in trade journals or conference sessions. In the last few years, there has been greater focus on the importance of preparing principals for their roles at a time when turnover is rising and when the negative effects of those changes on building stability and student outcomes can be quantified. However, even with increasing focus on principal preparation, there was little research into how district and university partners could collaborate to support educational leaders upon securing a position and during those first critical years of transition into their new roles.

Case Study

Colorado State University's School of Education has a robust Principal Licensure program that graduates a cohort of future PK-12 educational leaders annually. Although the Principal Licensure program's main focus is to prepare educators to take on the responsibilities of the principalship and meet state requirements for licensing, it also provides the requirements for those who fill other responsibilities in the PK-12 education system, such as deans, assistant principals, and department or program directors. The program's utilization of a cohort model builds strong relationships between students and with the faculty, resulting in ongoing connections well beyond graduation. These connections aid faculty in recognizing that the increased complexities, stresses, and requirements of educational leadership require new approaches to ongoing leadership support, especially in the first years of a leader's position. They understand that if they are going to build a more robust leadership pipeline, new supports needed to be made available to the graduates of the licensure program.

In 2017, Dr. Donna Cooner and Dr. Wendy Fothergill launched the School Leadership Institute (SLI) to provide resources and support to recent licensure graduates as they put their skills into practice as new educational leaders. Two institutes were held in consecutive years, each with a different cohort group. Each institute took place over two days at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado and was facilitated by professors of Colorado State University's School of Education and administrators from the Poudre School District, a local PK-12 educational partner.

Participants for the SLI were selected from recent graduating cohorts of Colorado State University's Principal Licensure program who were in their first three years as PK-12 educational leaders in their respective districts. These leaders (see Table 3.1) were the target population for the study, as described by Gliner et al. (2017, p. 138). SLI occurred with two different cohort groups on succeeding years. Each year the cohort groups consisted of nine participants, including principals, assistant principals, deans, and district administrators working in schools and districts ranging in size from 1,000 to 56,000 students. The 18 participants represented districts considered rural, suburban, and urban as well as public and private school settings.

Invitations to participate in SLI were sent to recently employed graduates of the licensure program and attendance at the institutes and involvement in the subsequent interviews were voluntary; thus, those participating in the study were a convenience sample, as outlined by Gliner et al. (2017, p. 140). After Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix C) approval and after gathering participant consent (see Focus Group Consent Form, Appendix B), focus group discussions were conducted on December 4–6, 2018 and December 6–8, 2019.

Table 3.1*Demographics of School Leadership Institute Participants*

Measure	Item	Count	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	9	50.0
	Male	9	50.0
Ethnicity	Latino	4	22.2
	Native American	1	5.6
	White	13	72.2
Role	Dean	3	16.7
	Assistant Principal	9	50.0
	Principal	3	16.7
	District	3	16.7
Level	Early Childhood	1	5.6
	Elementary	4	22.2
	Middle	5	27.8
	High	6	33.3
	District	2	11.1
Location	Rural	5	27.8
	Suburban	11	61.1
	Urban	2	11.1
Funding to Attend	Private	16	88.9
	Public	2	11.1

Focus Group

As part of the SLI, five facilitators with multiple years of building-level educational leadership conducted semi-structured interviews composed of four to five participants. SLI designed interaction between facilitators and participants across multiple reflective activities prior to the focus group interviews in order to foster and build rapport and trust. Rapport allowed both the facilitators and participants to create a sense of “fitting in” (Glesne, 2016, p. 137) which opens the door for relationships of trust to be built. These relationships of trust are critical in qualitative research: “Once rapport has led to trust, people are generally more willingly to talk

about personal or sensitive issues” (Glesne, 2016, p. 140). The audio recordings of the subsequent focus group sessions revealed the natural flow of conversation and participation between members of the cohort, demonstrating that a strong sense of rapport was developed. The depth of personal response and vulnerability evidenced by participant responses further indicated a solid measure of trust had been established with each other and with the focus group facilitators.

With rapport and trust created, cohort members at both SLI convenings were invited to join three separate focus group discussions. Each of the three focus groups approached the dialogue through different lenses: past, present, and future. The goal of each focus group was to better understand the participants’ view points on their leadership preparation program and the effectiveness of the training provided for their first three years as educational leaders.

The researchers created three questions to further explore the past, present, and future of the school administrators participating in the research discussion groups:

1. PAST: Based upon your current role, what is your current understanding of a principal preparation program?
2. PRESENT: Based on your current role, what is your current understanding of the principalship?
3. FUTURE: Based on your current role, what do you foresee in your future?

Each of the focus group questions had sub-questions to help illicit a deeper understanding and meaning from each participant. These sub-questions consisted of the following:

1. PAST: Based upon your current role, what is your current understanding of a principal preparation program?
 - a. Think back to your principal preparation program:

- i. What worked for you during your preparation program? Why?
 - ii. What do you wish it would have included?
 - iii. Knowing what you know now about the job, what would you change about the preparation program?
 - b. What advice would you give to people entering a preparation program?
 - c. What advice would you give to institutions of higher education, to design a high-quality preparation program?
- 2. PRESENT: Based on your current role, what is your current understanding of the principalship?
 - a. I cannot imagine doing my work without...
 - b. Give an example of how you have received support in your current role.
 - i. Think beyond formal supports that are built into your role.
 - c. What is the best advice a mentor (past or present) gave you?
 - d. What keeps you awake at night?
 - e. What thoughts or activities allow you to sleep at night?
 - f. Identify your stressors as a new administrator?
 - g. What might support look like to help you manage these stressors?
 - h. As a new administrator, where do you need support?
- 3. FUTURE: Based on your current role, what do you foresee in your future?
 - a. What would make you leave this position?
 - i. Thinking beyond personal.
 - ii. Think about physical, mental, emotional.
 - b. What would make a difference in you staying in this position?

- c. If you could redesign support in this job, what action could be taken to make it more sustainable?

These questions were asked in a semi-structured interview format and anchored the discussion for the focus groups. In this format, the prepared questions served as an interview guide but permitted facilitators to ask follow-up questions and allow the participants' conversation to stray from the original questions as the conversations naturally developed. The questions were designed to be open-ended so participants could express their own views of their preparation program and needs for support. Heron and Reason (1997) explained the nature of constructivist knowledge is "individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus" (p. 290). The semi-structured interview format and the open-ended nature of the questions allowed each participant to discuss their understandings in a way that fostered consensus on many points during the interviews, and the format allowed the researchers to review the data looking for additional points of consensus within and across each cohort group.

Each focus group session was recorded in order to facilitate accuracy in documentation and to allow for repeated reviews of the audio files and transcripts to hear the "voice" of each participant, clarify questions as the research progressed, and identify points of consensus. The session recordings were transcribed by a service. A few comments on the tapes were marked "inaudible" by the transcribers and required additional reviews by the researcher with higher quality tools to fill in these blanks. This allowed the researcher to not only verify the accuracy of the transcripts but to begin working with the data. As Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) stated, "Transcription facilitates the close attention and the interpretive thinking that is needed to make sense of the data" (p. 82).

Data Analysis

SLI data analysis was a multi-step process derived from the recommendations of various authorities on qualitative data analysis. These steps included grounding, bracketing, initial work with the data, coding, reflection, synthesis, and reporting (Bazeley, 2013; Glesne, 2016; Grbich, 2013; Humble & Radina, 2019). The first step in the analysis was an in-depth grounding and preparation in the subject matter as recommended by Humble and Radina (2019, p. 50-51). This step was achieved by the researcher through eighteen years in both K-12 building and district leadership, and an extensive literature review on the specific problem of preparation and retention of novice leaders. Before working with the data, Grbich (2013, p. 96) called out the importance of bracketing in order to study the experience objectively. Bracketing is the act of identifying inherent or potential biases, experiences, factors, assumptions and preconceptions in order to suspend judgment and focus on the experience. Although bracketing was part of the initial preparation for analyzing the data, the researcher continued to be mindful of the identified factors in order to have an objective experience with the data throughout the process.

After the preliminary stages of grounding and bracketing, analysis continued with initial work using the audio and transcript files. Bazeley (2013, p. 101) described this as an opportunity to become familiar with the data through reading, reflecting, and connecting. It gives the researcher the opportunity to get a sense of the whole before breaking the data into smaller parts. During this initial work with the data, the researcher used the recommendations of Bazeley (2013, p. 101-104) and Glesne (2016, p. 190-193) in using organizational tools such as memos, annotations, quotation files, and tracking questions and reflections to better understand the data and prepare for the next step of coding.

Coding was completed in order to identify the major themes from the transcripts, as described by Grbich (2013, pp. 96 & 100), through rudimentary categorizations suggested by Glesne (2016, p. 193). The work of coding the data was more than simply labeling; it was an opportunity to link themes and concepts, to sort and define, to make notes on actions, perspectives, processes and values, and to create a codebook (Glesne, 2016, pp. 195-196). Throughout the coding process the researcher used the recommendation by Grbich to continually question the data and any emerging assumptions in order to allow for new conceptualizations to arise (2013, p. 96). Codes were refined and reworked through interacting with the data and the distilling of categorizations. This process was greatly facilitated by use of the qualitative data analysis software, *NVivo*.

Bird (2005) and Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) explained that the process of coding is iterative and provides greater insight, depth, and understanding as the researcher continues to interact with the data set. This methodology fits well with the nature of constructivist research because as Heron and Reason (1997) explained, the constructivist accumulation of knowledge is through “more informed and sophisticated reconstructions” (p. 290). Each of these iterative coding actions helped the researcher identify meaning inherent in the data through common themes shared across the experiences of SLI participants.

The final step of data analysis was to synthesis and prepare to report the data. *NVivo* software again proved to be a significant tool at this stage of the case study as this step provided the opportunity to put the codes to work by manipulating the data and finding relationships, interrelationships, and patterns (Glesne, 2016, p. 200) and to move past concepts to describing, evolving, and theorizing (Bazeley, 2013, p. 227). Upon multiple reviews of the coded data, the

researcher synthesized the shared experiences of SLI participants to help the reader gain a deeper understanding of the essence of their experiences.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Trustworthiness and rigor in qualitative research endeavors are critical. For this case study, trustworthiness was accomplished through both triangulation of data as well as peer review and debriefing (Glesne, 2016, p. 53). Triangulation of data occurred as prominent themes and consensus emerged within and across each SLI cohort group. Such findings led to the credibility of the participants' experiences and "rang true" across the entire course of interviews. Trustworthiness was further established by sharing the findings with other educational leaders outside of SLI for peer review and debriefing. This step sought to confirm the trustworthiness of the study by verifying its generalization across practitioners in various stages of their careers and from graduates of other educational leadership programs. The peer review provided a measure of examination to verify the findings were credible and reflective of their own shared experiences. As the study was deemed trustworthy and generalizable through these steps, the findings can be used to shape and refine current and future educational leadership preparation programs and as scaffolded support of educational leaders in their first years of service.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This research study consisted of focus group discussions facilitated at the School Leadership Institute (SLI), a retreat for novice educational leaders hosted by a major university located in the Intermountain West. The participants of the study were graduates of the university's principal licensure program and had been invited to the retreat, in part, to discuss their leadership preparation at the university, their current needs as practicing K-12 educational leaders, and what would help them continue in the work. Focus groups occurred over two different retreats in consecutive years. Each retreat had a unique set of participants for a total of 18 leaders who were part of the study.

The coding progression for this study was an iterative process that began with listening to the 12 and a half hours of focus group interviews and reviewing the written transcripts to get a better feel for the totality of the data set. During this process, a number of overall themes and ideas presented themselves as starting points for coding. After hours of initial review, the researcher found a saturation point where new themes and ideas were not appearing. The main themes and ideas were identified when the finishing of the initial review did not yield substantial changes. This initial review yielded 16 larger theme categories considered "top-level" codes. Within these top-level codes, multiple "sub-level" and a few "tertiary-level" codes were identified and organized.

In order to begin the coding process, the researcher utilized *NVivo* software to identify and organize top-level, sub-level, and tertiary-level codes. This process allowed the researcher to further refine the top-level codes to 13 and better arrange the 23 sub-level and three tertiary-level codes under the appropriate top-level code. The process continued as the researcher labeled

transcript selections with the identified codes. A total of 1,309 separate selections were labeled and categorized under the identified codes. Another review of the coded transcripts identified about 50 selections that needed to be re-coded to better match the intent of the participants' conversations and relocate those selections within the new coding hierarchy. After repeated interactions with the transcripts, the researcher refined the codes further to more accurately reflect the meaning of study participants, minimize overlap, and solidify patterns found across the data. This final refinement resulted in three top-codes, 26 sub-codes, and eight tertiary-codes that comprised the key findings of the research and were used to interpret the data as presented in this chapter.

Findings Overview

Each SLI focus group was designed with an emphasis on either the past, present, or future. The following research questions guided the inquiry:

1. How did graduates of a principal licensure program describe key elements in their preparation to become practicing educational leaders and what did they identify as key elements missing in that preparation?
2. How do graduates of a principal licensure program perceive their first three years in an administrative role?
3. What supports would make a difference for new educational leaders to persist in school leadership?

The discussions within each of the 12 focus groups was very natural in flow, cadence, and interaction between participants. Questions provided by university faculty serving as facilitators provided a starting point for the participants' discussions and an opportunity for regular checks along the way, but the conversation between participants in each of the focus groups shifted

between their experiences, past, present, and future, even though sessions were primarily geared toward only one of the three areas of focus. The coding process identified this association across the discussions. The intent of the focus groups was to discuss past, present, and future, but the context of their use spanned across the three areas of focus. The past was primarily discussed in terms of participants' preparation program; whereas, the present was discussed in terms of participants' need for support in their current positions, and the future around the idea of continuing in a leadership position. These three areas of the past, present, and future guided the description of the study's findings to explain them in slightly different terms: (a) preparation program characteristics (past), (b) post-hire supports (present), and (c) continuing in the work (future).

The Past: Preparation Program Characteristics

Participants for the SLI were selected from recent graduating cohorts of Colorado State University's Principal Licensure program who were in their first three years as PK-12 educational leaders in their respective districts. For participants, the principal licensure program generally began with a three week face-to-face, intensive summer semester held on a CSU campus. Though the pace and intensity of the three weeks is significant, participants of the SLI indicated it was a vital step in creating the overall climate and culture of their cohorts moving forward, necessary in bringing the group together as a cohesive team, and foundational to carry them through the remainder of the licensure experience. One participant stated:

I remember the feeling after that three weeks during the summer. It was so intense, and to know everybody so well. And at that point in life, it was exactly what I needed. I couldn't put it into words. I felt accomplished after that.

Participants shared that they appreciated that the program flexibility and scheduling of the licensure program seemed tailored to their needs as adult learners. Participants noted that

university faculty created a program that met overall objectives while still providing flexibility in their assignments that made learning more meaningful. This, at times, dovetailed with interests and responsibilities they were engaged in at work. Faculty held principal licensure students accountable but also understood they had work priorities and family obligations to juggle along with their schooling. Scheduling was important to many participants because the program was condensed, so it did not take years for principal licensure students to complete and had a combination of in-person, blended learning, online, and evening classes that allowed them to be fully employed while attending the program.

SLI participants expressed their appreciation for the CSU instructors in the principal licensure program because of their accessibility and the varied backgrounds and experiences they brought to class. Many participants shared they were grateful for their ability to contact an instructor before, during, and after the program to discuss system structures or assignments or to ask advice in preparing for new roles or how to handle new situations once they were employed. Participants deemed these conversations as very meaningful interactions that helped them reflect and improve. Some of their most meaningful interactions went beyond any new information being shared by the instructor to a sense of an instructor being a true thought partner around a problem of practice. During the focus groups, participants further expressed the need to have instructors with wide-ranging leadership styles and backgrounds across the K-12 spectrum. Instructors with varied experience at the elementary, secondary, and district levels helped broaden participants' thinking, prepared them for a variety of roles, and provided practical experiences from which to learn.

A major finding of this study was the importance of a cohort model, which will be addressed in more detail later in this section. Even though participants of the CSU licensure

program acknowledged during the focus groups that some classes could reasonably be done through an online experience, overall, the general consensus was a found strength in meeting together in-person. Participants shared a general sense that some experiences could not be realized as effectively in an online format. Two examples of such experiences were the ability to learn to work with others and time for reflection. Participants were grateful for the opportunities to work on challenging projects in groups. One participant shared that it helped them to “learn about yourself and how you worked with a group” and to practice specific leadership skills while working within a group. One participant said:

That whole time you're learning about how well do I work with people. I remember driving home some days thinking to myself, “Oh, I just stood up in front of those people and said, “No, I think this is how we should do it.” Or, “Why don't we try it this way?”

These experiences helped participants better understand themselves while honing group dynamic skills vital to any leader. They also cited in-person reflection as being a meaningful part of the program. Though reflections, for example, written responses, and the creation of portfolios are cited as helpful and can easily be done through an online class, principal licensure students greatly appreciated in-person discussions to reflect together. Participants felt these reflective dialogues helped to refine thinking and lead to deeper levels of consideration. Reflective dialogues can occur online, but they did not have the same depth and natural flow as in-person experiences. Overall, there was a sense among participants that their most valuable learning occurred during components of the program designed to be in-person.

Before moving to more specific findings on preparation program characteristics, the data revealed another general finding that an effective leadership program expands the thinking of the principal licensure student. Such thinking goes beyond the limited organizational view they had experienced to date in their current positions to a much broader systematic way of seeing and

thinking about an organization as a whole. Participants discussed how as teachers, they felt they had a good understanding of the daily operations of a school building; however, the licensure program provided opportunities for practice and reflection, opening their understanding to a much larger and more complex set of issues than previously imagined. One candidate stated:

It's interesting to have that teacher perspective where you think you know what's going on in a school building, to having gone through the preparation program [and] realize how many things really are going on in a school building every day. . . and how much leadership that takes.

The licensure program provided opportunities for meaningful practice focused on experiences outside of a single classroom or department. These provided participants with a greater understanding of systems thinking and helped them understand “how much it really takes” to run a school, as one participant stated.

Although the focus group dialogues yielded overall general characteristics that participants felt important for a principal licensure program, the dialogues also included themes that were more specific and pervasive. These areas deemed essential to a successful program included: leadership self-discovery, preparation for various roles, meaningful practice, access to leaders, getting the job, the cohort model, and discrete skills. The focus groups also identified significant areas for improvement. The following sections examines each of these themes in more detail. Table 4.1 outlines the number of times participants referred to key principal licensure program characteristics.

Table 4.1

Coding of Preparation Program Characteristics

Characteristic	References
Leadership self-discovery	35
Preparation for various roles	28
Meaningful practice	83

Access to leaders	35
Getting the job	11
Discrete skills	86
The cohort	78
Areas for improvement	115

Leadership Self-Discovery

Many SLI participants reported refinement, and even creation, of their own personal leadership identities because they had multiple interactions with leadership development activities and time to reflect on practices and beliefs. Over the course of the licensure program, participants asked themselves questions such as, “Why am I pursuing this?”, “What do I believe?” and, “What are my core values moving forward?” One participant stated, “It was really never about the assignments. It was always about what the assignments were getting you to learn about yourself.” This self-discovery process often focused on identification of leadership skillsets and desires, self-actualization as leaders, grounding in their “why,” and refinement of styles, value systems, and beliefs. One participant said:

It helped me to understand it's okay to be me. I do have a leadership style. . . . I think so many times you see that word “leader” or hear the word “leader” and we all have a picture in our head of what it looks like. Or we hear something and what it sounds like. . . . And what I learned is it can sound and look so many different ways. I can be me and I can lead by being me.

Additionally, another participant said, “It was really good for me to sit down and analyze and discover the type of leader I was.” This process seemed to lead participants from seeing leadership as a nebulous idea to seeing a more concrete understanding of who they were as leaders and where they wanted to go in their careers.

Preparation for Various Roles

The CSU principal licensure program takes a group of graduate students with varying backgrounds, experiences, and roles to create a cohort that works together during their principal licensure. SLI participants indicated one of the most useful parts of the this program was the opportunity to expand their horizons by being exposed to a variety of roles and responsibilities across the K-12 spectrum and observing and practicing settings and skillsets outside their current working experience and assignments. These opportunities came by working in a cohort with those of varying backgrounds that included: (a) elementary, secondary, and district levels; (b) charter, private, and public systems; (c) rural, suburban, and urban settings; and (d) general and specialized educators. Opportunities to expand their thinking also included learning alongside instructors with varying backgrounds and an internship program requiring hours across a variety of settings. Taken together, all of these experiences allowed participants to get a broader view of the K-12 system in districts and to prepare themselves for a variety of roles which might interest them now or in the future. One participant said, “I think they did a good job of putting you in situations where you really did have to try things that you never tried before.” Even within a certain administrative position, participants shared that they were grateful that the licensure program gave them a broad array of experience within the specified position. Another participant noted that this broad exposure allowed principal licensure students to see “a wide variety of what they will see in the actual job.” Participants expressed gratitude for the exposure to different opportunities, experiences, and people and felt this intentionality within the program was significant in preparing them for a variety of future roles.

Meaningful Practice

A significant sub-code that emerged from the participants' discussions at the SLI retreat was the importance of meaningful practice across the principal licensure program. Participants mentioned the lectures and readings were avenues of new information for the principal licensure students; however, participants expressed the realism of the projects they were asked to complete helped them best prepare for their current roles as educational leaders in their buildings and districts. For many participants, this practice was an opportunity to build leadership skills and character development that translated into feeling more confident as they pursued, and ultimately acted upon, new leadership positions. As some of these new leaders reflected back, they realized how helpful the meaningful practice truly was to their current success. At times, help came in already having a template or process in place to handle situations and challenges arising in their new leadership positions. One participant described it as a "plug and play" resource library. Other participants reflected that many of the skillsets they developed through meaningful practice were less concrete, but nonetheless, very valuable in their new roles, such as learning to deal with ambiguity. As a participant discussed projects that did not always have explicit steps or clear directions for completion, they stated: "I think [the instructors] love making us squirm. And just the idea of, 'You've got to be okay with ambiguity. You've got to be okay with not knowing. You've got to be okay with not having all the information.'" This participant said in their current position, they deal with ambiguity every day and such soft skill development is important to future leaders. As the dialogue continued across the various focus groups, meaningful practice was further parsed into separate tertiary codes: scenarios and hands-on practice and internships.

Scenarios and Hands-On Practice. A great deal of dialogue between group participants focused on the importance of meaningful practice in the form of scenarios and hands-on practice. These projects were varied in from and included role playing events, task-focused material preparation, and planning for likely responsibilities encountered in the first year as an instructional leader. One role-playing activity participants felt was particularly instructive was a scenario where principal licensure students were given a realistic set of issues that all needed to be addressed within a short amount of time. Principal licensure students were required to prioritize the list and explain how and why they would address the issues in the order they had determined best. Participants acknowledged that their current positions required them to do this every day. Another role-playing experience mentioned multiple times during the focus group interviews involved a team preparing a presentation to a group of outside volunteers playing the part of a school board. A participant said:

I failed a bunch of questions. But that level of pressure, obviously, it's a simulated situation, but just going through that experience of fielding that intense attention and pressure is valuable in itself. The contents of the project don't even really matter. It was just that experience and then defending your decisions and speaking with people that are trying to kind of trip you up. I thought it was really valuable.

Task-focused material preparation such as making school master schedules, creating a teacher improvement plan and accompanying documentation, and generating letters of reprimand proved important to the participants. Participants of SLI were also grateful that the meaningful practice extended to activities they would likely need in their interviews and first few months in a new leadership position, such as a school entry plan.

Internships. Internships were deemed a significant step in helping principal licensure students prepare for a variety of roles in educational leadership. The internship requires 300 documented hours of leadership experiences divided across the four Colorado Principal Quality

Standards (see Appendix A) with at least 100 hours being outside of their own level (i.e., elementary, secondary, and district). Internship hours gave principal licensure students the opportunity to put into practice the skills they had been learning in classes. Participants reflected that the skills they learned in class could be applied, to an extent in their internships, and it was the application in real-world situations which helped cement classroom learning.

Additionally, internship structures required principal licensure students to acquire hours across different settings and in many skillsets, which provided exposure to a much broader array of experiences and leaders than they likely would have had without such requirements. Participants commented on how beneficial this variety was to help them understand a larger system and to learn from leaders with differing skillsets and leadership styles. Participants felt this variety contributed to a more comprehensive preparation. Although, for some participants, the internship lacked at times due to choosing a site with a mentor who was not prepared for the experience, or due to hours in activities they felt were less beneficial, such as supervising a high school volleyball game. Overall, participants were grateful for the significant leadership moments where they were able to observe and support building leaders with such responsibilities as discipline, observations, evaluations, writing improvement plans, and non-renewals.

Over time as the principal licensure program developed, a new component was added to the internship that required a four-day intensive leadership experience. Internship requirements were gathered in hourly and daily increments, but the university determined a more intensive and realistic scenario was needed. When possible, principal licensure students completed an experience where they were the acting leader in a building over the course of four days. This provided a different level of understanding and depth because principal licensure students did not simply leave after a day. They experienced continuity working on a problem or situation across

multiple days. Participants felt this type of practice allowed them to feel more confident in making decisions and to act in the face of new scenarios that came their way. For them there was a marked difference in this type of practice where they transitioned from observing and assisting to “actually taking over,” as one participant stated, as the acting administrator.

Access to Leaders

Participants felt a key component of their preparation was access to leaders currently doing the job. Focus group dialogue focused on three main explanations for this value on face-time with building and district leaders. First, the time spent with leaders presented principal licensure students with a variety of leadership experience and styles. They appreciated the same question could be asked of different leaders and they would have a chance to hear different ways to approach an issue. Principal licensure students could find a style and approach they felt would work for them. Second, access to leaders provided principal licensure students with guidance and counsel in moving the theory of the classroom to the practice of building leadership. One participant summed this thought up well by stating, “Real people, talking about real jobs, giving us real scenarios. I thought it brought it all to life.” Finally, practicing leaders shared specific examples of situations and how they were handled. Principal licensure students realized many of them would be facing similar circumstances in the future and these examples could be very beneficial models. One participant referenced a discussion with a high school principal who talked to their cohort about a year of an extended string of tragedies. He said:

My first thought was, "Somebody else in this room is going to experience something like that." And she talked very specifically about how they dealt with that and some ways that people kind of kept their heads above water while it felt like everything was falling apart.

To hopeful educational leaders, these types of specific examples helped them process and prepare for future roles. Although access to other districts was not a major component of the

discussion, multiple participants acknowledged it was a chance to learn more about surrounding districts and to begin networking with leaders that could have a hand in helping them get hired in the future. For many SLI participants, access to current leaders was deemed a highlight of both their intensive summer experience and other classes throughout the program.

Getting the Job

SLI participants discussed components of the CSU principal program that were helpful in securing their current leadership positions. These components went beyond meeting the overall licensure qualifications to include increased marketability for a broader range of positions due to their exposure and work in a variety of settings and experiences. Focus group conversations also focused on two specific practices that better prepared participants for the interview processes they faced after graduation. For many participants, they were grateful for a role-playing scenario where each principal licensure student had a mock interview experience with real administrators. This provided most them with a meaningful opportunity to prepare for, participate in, and receive feedback regarding leadership interviewing. Participants shared that these mock interviews helped them practice and identify areas for improvement before real interviews, which for some took place a few weeks afterwards. They were also required to prepare a portfolio to assist in the hiring process. These portfolios documented the work they had done across the Colorado Principal Quality Standards (see Appendix A). Although portfolios in many fields are commonly used to demonstrate candidate qualifications to potential employers, this was not what SLI participants valued most. During the discussion, they emphasized the reflective nature of the process and the manner in which it helped them verify their experience across every standard, organize their thoughts, and be prepared to speak to the experience they had acquired as novice leaders.

Discrete Skills

SLI participants' discussion commonly focused on discrete skills they believed were essential to being an educational leader in today's K-12 environment. These were skills they felt they had used extensively or needed in their current roles as new instructional leaders. Participants felt it was important these skillsets were part of the curricular outcomes of any leadership preparatory program. The skillset list generated by participants was extensive and widely arrayed with 115 different occurrences across the 12 focus group discussions. A data review found common themes in these suggestions and reduced the recommended skillsets to themes including the following: critical conversations; pre- and post-staff observations; varied discipline models; cognitive coaching methods for staff; models of supervision and evaluation; conflict resolution; master scheduling; teacher improvement plans and practices; hiring and firing processes; change management and leadership; backwards design; creating positive culture and climate; social emotional learning models and practices; assessment proficiency and practices; safety procedures and incident command training; school resource management; teacher recruitment; school performance frameworks, special education, and 504 processes; HIPPA and FERPA regulations; handling OCR complaints; working with special populations; mandatory reporting; trauma informed practices; supporting adult learners and professional development best practices; family, school, and community partnerships; diversity and inclusion training; data-based decision making; school law; delegation and self-management promising practices; and collaborative working models. Although this list was not comprehensive, the skillsets outlined were deemed crucial to the participants current success as building and district leaders.

The Cohort

Of the 14 sub-codes identified as successful characteristics of the principal licensure program, the use of the cohort model was deemed one of the most significant in helping candidates achieve success within the program and being prepared for their current leadership positions. Multiple SLI participants shared that the cohort was the most important characteristic of the program. One participant stated:

What I anticipated working, and what did work, and the reason I picked this program was the cohort model. I'm sure I wasn't the only one who was weighing my options with an online program that would have cost significantly less. But the reality that I believed at the time—and I look back, and I believe it to be true now—is that the power is in the people, the people you work with, the people you get to know, and the connections you build. And to me that was probably the most valuable part of the program and still is.

Within the cohort, participants found help and encouragement across the learning progression, opportunities to practice intensive collaborative work, and an ongoing network of colleagues they would continue to access when they needed support with a current issue. Even those who were seeking the opposite experience of a cohort felt ultimately that the model was a major advantage of their licensure program. One participant said:

When I even was looking into the program, I was looking for things like, "Get me totally online. I don't want to go to classes. I just want to be on my own" but [the cohort] became such a huge factor. And I tell everybody now I'd go do the CSU program because of the cohort process, and being face-to-face with people, and learning from each other, and that relationship piece. And that was the one thing I didn't want going into it. I just wanted it to be like, "Let me just go home and work by myself." [The cohort] was the biggest advantage for sure.

For participants, the relationships they created during the cohort allowed them to find support as they navigated new learning. These supports often came in the form of encouragement as they were facing the challenges of balancing their current work assignments, family and personal responsibilities, and the demands of completing a graduate program. The relationships within the cohort were described in terms such as “meaningful,” “powerful,” and “huge.” Some

participants entered the program thinking it would be a competitive atmosphere, and instead, participants shared that they found a “support network” which felt like “self-care.” One participant said, “I really appreciated the cohort, to be able to get together with the same group of people. You form this bond with different people, different levels. I still know every single person that graduated with me.”

The principal licensure program provides opportunities for principal licensure students to learn leadership skills and abilities; whereas, the cohort model fosters learning in an environment where the collaborative working proficiencies required of educational leaders can be further developed and accelerated. As principal licensure students completed meaningful practice and scenario projects, the ability to process with others and learn from people with different backgrounds and experiences led them to an enhanced experience that could not be replicated by other models. Participants shared that they appreciated the diversity of roles, experiences, backgrounds, attitudes, beliefs, and leadership styles found within their cohort groups. The realization that each cohort member brought a unique experience to the group led participants to identify, as this participant highlighted, “Everybody has a purpose.” As found in the program’s access to various leaders, the diversity of cohort members provided a richer, deeper experience and a broader preparation for their future leadership roles.

Principal Licensure Program Improvements

Throughout the focus group sessions that addressed past preparation, present needs, and future considerations, SLI participants offered ideas on how the licensure program could continue to improve and better prepare graduates for the needs they encountered during their first three years in leadership positions. Although they understood they had been prepared in many areas, they still felt there were gaps they needed to learn on the job. One participant who

discussed the need for more content said, “I know that there's strategies and things out there that they can send us into the field with . . . versus learning it on our own.” Principal licensure students’ recommendations for program improvements included attention to specific content areas, modifications to some learning methods and delivery models, and a few overall programmatic considerations.

Participants also recommended increased attention during the licensure program to the discrete skills mentioned earlier in this chapter. Some participants felt development and understanding around leadership characteristics and traits was very well done, but they would have appreciated more information regarding discrete skills they referred to as “content.” The most regularly requested skill they desired greater depth in understanding included: (a) student discipline; (b) school law, and particularly, special education law; (c) hiring and termination practices; (d) how to effectively coach teachers and adult learners; (e) handling conflict and difficult people; and (f) staff evaluation practices. Even though these skills were covered in the program, participants felt these were areas in which they were the least prepared to handle during their first years as educational leaders.

When discussing program improvements, participants placed importance on modifications to learning methods and delivery models. The dominate theme in this category was a desire for more hands-on scenarios and tabletop exercises. Principal licensure students shared that they wanted more scenario practice that dealt with coaching teachers and dealing with personal conflicts. They felt fishbowl activities where they could observe and critique practice, such as a teacher observation, would be far more successful in understanding a process and gaining confidence in a skill than readings and discussions on such issues. Participants felt scenarios where they could practice an Individualized Education Plan meeting or create a

professional development activity would be helpful. Participants also wondered if authentic practice experiences, such as interviewing students in the teacher licensure groups, could lead to positive practice for both interviewers and the interviewees. Participants discussed that most program scenarios had consisted of a single practice attempt and feedback. They felt if they could add a second practice, informed by initial feedback, and then receive a second round of feedback following a subsequent practice, these scenarios would be much more powerful. This modification to scenario practices consisting of successive practice and feedback loops would allow principal licensure students to better gauge their growth. Participants discussed the mock principal interviews they had participated in as an example of this successive practice. They voiced that a second interview session after receiving feedback from their first practice would have led to more powerful learning and would have better prepared and refined them for their actual interviews.

SLI participants also offered a handful of suggestions for overall programmatic improvements. One repeated desire was to make sure the faculty teaching the classes were still regularly connected with schools and districts and had recently been in K-12 leadership positions. The participants felt this would provide a more accurate look at the demands of today's positions. Their dialogue focused on the need to better prepare building and district leaders who had agreed to have internship students shadowing them. A better understating of the principal licensure student's objectives, goals, and overall needs could help avoid some situations where the interns felt it had not been a quality experience. Another suggestion by the participants was that time should be spent on preparing principal licensure students to secure an assistant principal (AP) or dean position, which they felt was much more likely than becoming a building principal directly out of the program. Participants shared that learning the nuances between the roles of

dean and AP, compared to a principal role, could better prepare them for job interviews and help them secure a more likely first position as educational leaders. Finally, participant responses revealed that a theme for improvement was to have mechanisms in place for graduates of the licensure program to gather together, maintain, and foster important ties to the program and its faculty.

Although improvements to preparation programs are needed, as voiced by SLI participants, it is important to note that these new leaders also recognized it was not possible to have proficiency in every skillset or need required to be an educational leader in our current K-12 environment. They understood there would indeed be on-the-job learning. One participant stated:

But you're never going to be 100% ready. You couldn't possibly be until you're in the job itself. So, I think a big component [of the preparation program] has to just be building the skills, character development, and things of that nature that just make you feel more confident in making the decisions, and acting in those new scenarios that come your way.

Another participant made a similar observation:

You're never going to exit a preparation program feeling 100% because you don't know.... Even in the role, you don't know day to day what you might be facing. So how could you possibly be exposed to all of that prior [to getting hired]?

The complexity of educational leaders' role is too dynamic for a single program to completely prepare any individual for building and district leadership. For this reason, SLI candidates spoke at length about post-hire supports they deemed critical for their continued growth and success.

The Present: Post-Hire Supports

As described in the compelling research by Riley (2018), the job of educational leaders represents a significant increase in stressors compared to the work of the general population. Riley concluded that principals experience high levels of job demands (1.5 times the general population), emotional demands (1.7 times), and emotional labor (1.7 times) being the highest

demands when compared to the general population. Riley found that this was correlated with higher levels of burnout (1.6 times), stress symptoms (1.7 times), difficulty sleeping (2.2 times), cognitive stress (1.5 times), somatic symptoms (1.3 times), and depressive symptoms (1.3 times; p. 16). Taking the job demands of principals and adding the learning curve of being a new educational leader can create a significant number of stressors, especially in those first three years in a leadership role. One SLI participant referenced the difficulty in just the newness of his role by saying:

So, in time, [you will get comfortable] on your own. [Because] you've seen it. You've dealt with this, this, this, and this year after year. It's just getting to that point and having patience to get there. Because there's lots of stuff we're dealing with we haven't dealt with before. So, it's stressful because we don't know the best way to go about it. We haven't failed enough, we haven't succeeded enough, to know. Just like in the classroom, it takes years to get there, to fail and succeed, to know what works.

As part of the SLI dialogues, participants were naturally drawn to conversations regarding the stressors they had encountered in their new roles and responsibilities and the critical need for post-hire supports. One participant poignantly stated:

It's just so much more than I thought. Just so much more. . . . It's so hard to perceive the levels of stress that I think the job brings. I don't know how anyone can really speak to it. I don't know how you can really hear it. I don't know how you learn about it in a classroom until you're there and you can feel it. You cannot practice or pretend what it feels like.

As participants discussed stressors in a very open and vulnerable manner, they also looked to the future and what might help them in their responsibilities. Throughout the focus group dialogues, they discussed the post-hire supports they either had in place, or desired to have, in order to maintain their growth, effectiveness, and ultimately their well-being.

Stressors

Over the course of the SLI focus groups, there were 176 references to stressors these SLI participants experienced on a continual basis. These stressors can be organized into general

themes and are presented here in order to better understand the need for, and focus of, post-hire supports. The most significant stressors included, outlined in no particular order:

- *Work volume:* There was general consensus among participants that the volume of work far exceeded the capacity of any individual, and there was simply too much to do. The sense of being overwhelmed led to a lack of clarity about what needed to be accomplished. One participant said:

It's just the overwhelming mess of the job. It's the overwhelming—it's just the number of things—we always have the volume. The volume is really high. . . . [It] keeps me awake and saying, "How on earth I'm going to do all these things and do them well?" I think that more than anything else, it's just the magnitude of the job.

- *Constancy of stress:* All participants conceded that the stress was always there and it appeared there was never really a time to shut it off. It became a lifestyle rather than a job. Something always needed to be addressed or taken care of during the week, at night, or on the weekends. Many participants felt they worked in districts with what one participant described as "an unhealthy culture of workaholism."
- *Dysfunctional systems:* Many participants mentioned that the system they worked in needed to be led through significant changes to either address the product being delivered, the climate and culture of the building, or both. One participant worried if "what we are providing is good enough for our kids?" Another participant stated that a significant stressor was worrying about "when our adults fail our kids." Some felt they had either tried to push too hard to move the system and were experiencing dissonance, or they felt unable to execute a level of meaningful change.
- *Social isolation:* Participants talked about the loneliness of the job by stating, "So, so often we're alone," or "the further you go, the more alone you are." As they shifted to

an administrative position, many of their friendships also shifted and they found themselves increasingly aware that they did not fit in with the group. This was enhanced in small, rural communities where a public servant was recognizable while grocery shopping, out to eat, or going to church. The reality of this situation was summed up by a new principal in a rural community when he said:

I don't even want to get involved in friendships. I don't want to. We're trying to pick a church, and there's three churches that we like, but I literally can't figure out which one we're going to go to because all of the people, the leaders, or we have friends and people who've reached out to us . . . So saying yes to one is like saying no to the others. Or, the school board president is also a leader in one of the churches here, and my boss goes to another one, and I don't really want to go there - and just really struggling with how my place in the community is.

Additionally, even when a leader had an administrative team on site, they recognized they might still need to hold those members accountable in ways which create a hierarchy and limit interpersonal relationships. For a job so deeply people-centered, new leaders felt isolated.

- *Personal insecurities*: Most participants spoke to their insecurities as leaders as being a major stressor. For some, they were concerned they were not doing enough to serve their stakeholders, and for others, it was a heightened concern of disappointing those around them or the perceptions of others. Their insecurities were also manifested in the feeling they could not ever make mistakes because that would be letting people down. One participant stated, "I cannot live up to that expectation. That's just such a frustrating recipe. It just means that I'm going to let somebody down at some point, people, because I'm finite. I've got nothing left." Reinforcing those insecurities was the fact much of the feedback they received was not positive and focused on problems they needed to address. This stressor was significant enough that when one

participant offered, “I’m insecure, and self-conscious, and unconfident every day,” there was general consensus by the group that they felt the same way.

- *Negligible meaningful efforts:* A common stressor for participants was the realization that they spent a great deal of their time and energy on items that were pressing but not of importance for the instructional leadership of the building or department. A principal once described it as “being in the thick of thin things.” Leaders shared that they were extremely busy and taxed, but they did not see a majority of their efforts moving the organization forward to better meet the needs of students and staff. One participant stated their biggest stress was the inability to get into classes or programs and make a difference. This participant shared,

I wanted to get into three classrooms today, and I didn't get into any of them. And I wanted to talk to this coach today, and I never got a hold of them. And now tomorrow I need to get into six classrooms and talk to two coaches instead of one.

This stressor was heightened by the sheer number of staff each educational leader evaluated. Some indicated they were in charge of evaluating and supporting the growth of 30–40 certified staff members. One principal stated:

I would love to [have] more time to focus and support staff and teachers in the classroom and moving towards where we want to go as a building, but having more time to just be in there and really help them in the planning process, then watch them execute it, then come back and let's reflect, let's look at data. But to do that for 27 people that I evaluate, it's just almost impossible with all the other things that you're trying to juggle.

Between constant interruptions and the needs of other people, these new leaders were frustrated that they did not have more time to observe and coach teachers, build relationships with stakeholders, or get traction on building and district priorities.

- *Hostile parent behaviors*: Significant discussions regarding stressors focused on the number of extremely negative interactions they had with upset parents. Whether on the phone, in email, or in person, too often parents were aggressive, threatening, and extremely angry as they interacted with principals. Participants spoke of how often they were screamed, yelled, or sworn at. One leader of color shared a time a parent used racist comments towards them. They discussed the weaponization of media and lawyers by angry parents. In most cases, new leaders were surprised by the intensity of the anger. One participant shared this exchange with a parent:

[This] mom went from zero to 100. I have never heard someone yell through the phone as loud as this woman was yelling. She was screaming all kinds of profanity. She called back and continued to scream and made threats.

A simple statement summed it up: “There are a lot of really angry parents.” Though it might only be a small portion of the parents in an organization who behaved this way, it was a regular occurrence for many leaders. Much of the stress in these situations came from feeling they are inadequately prepared with the tools to work with people acting out in this manner.

- *Role intensity*: Although building and district leaders understand the role of a leader is to guide, support, and work through difficult situations, most of the participants shared they were not prepared for the intensity of the issues facing them on a constant, ongoing basis. The intensity felt by SLI participants seemed to emanate from the regular uncertainty inherent in most issues, not knowing what they would be facing on any particular day or situation, and the immediacy with which they often were required to make a decision. This thought was encapsulated when a new leader mentioned, “Everything has just been so new, and there's no time to really think

through it. I mean, so much you just make gut level decisions, moment by moment and hoping that it's not terrible.” Furthermore, one participant pondered, “I don't know if we were designed as humans to be at that level of intensity for that long every day. There are very few moments of just sitting and breathing. It's just so intense most of the time.”

- *Personal care:* Most of these new leaders indicated they were not taking care of themselves personally because of a lack of time and energy after meeting the needs of others. Participants expressed general concern that they did not have down time, and if they did have some moments to care for themselves, they had a feeling of guilt that they should be getting something else done. Most participants talked of falling out of long-held exercise regimens, gaining weight, and not getting adequate sleep. Additionally, participants felt considerable guilt that by the time they got home, their families were getting the emotional leftovers. They were exhausted and often felt unable to provide adequately for the needs of their partners and families. Nights and weekends were often spent working. In reference to their personal experiences as a new leader and seeking some efforts at self-care, a participant questioned, “I don't want it to be unbalanced. I don't want it to feel like this. Is it possible to not feel like this? That's the question.”
- *Staff pushback:* For many, the responsibilities of leadership would have been significantly lightened if it was not for a constant sense of pushback and negotiations with staff who were resistant to change or were having to work through issues to better support students. They spoke repeatedly of “pushback,” “barriers,” “struggle,” and “everything is a process” to the point that they felt unempowered to make

changes and move systems forward. What added to the stress was knowing while such resistance slowed change and improvements, the people they were tasked to serve were not having their needs met. One participant questioned,

How many kids and how many more families are going to be exposed to what we need to change in the meantime? And that's my personal dilemma, is that we only have these students for a certain amount of time and we have to get it right.

Another leader stated that what they cannot let go of is “when our adults fail our kids. When our adults, the decisions we make, fail our kids, and [the] adults don't want to hear that.” Though these leaders acknowledged these behaviors were not manifested by all of their staff, those who constantly pushed back, lacked follow-through, and did the “very bare minimum” consumed a great deal of energy and caused significant stress. Participants discussed the feeling that they were always “walking on eggshells,” and with so many different priorities and expectations, it was hard to move any organization in a common direction.

- *Weight of responsibilities:* Participants often spoke of the “weight” of their roles and responsibilities. Although the weight did have some crossovers with “intensity,” subtle differences occurred between the two. There was a general sense that everything was on the leader’s shoulders because ultimately, “the buck stops” with them. They expressed that it was exhausting to always carry so many expectations. One participant shared, “You feel like you’ve got to do everything.” Another participant offered, “It just wears on me, carrying those expectations around,” with another participant saying, “When it comes down to it, it’s all on you.” Adding to the weight was the realization that though they had very little control over the actions of students and staff, they were accountable for what took place in their buildings and

departments. This left participant leaders feeling they ultimately lacked control and regularly needed to answer for the actions of others. A participant said, “Every decision made in that building, whoever makes the decision, doesn't matter who, all that falls [onto] the principal. Right or wrong, it all comes back to the principal.” The weight also concerned participants’ feeling most of the time they were dealing with people and systems in crisis. One leader stated:

I don't want to deal with these people in crisis all the time. I mean these crazy situations, and things that I didn't even imagine that kids would have to live through—ever. You have a lot of good ideas. We all want to help, but you can't—sometimes you just try to fix it. You can't do what you thought. You just do what you can, and it doesn't do much and that keeps me up [at night].

- *Disconnect with supervisors:* SLI participants also discussed that a regular stressor came from not having the regular support of a supervisor. Commonly this desired support came in the form of needing resources and more clarity from their district office, often the superintendent, and not feeling they had it. They recognized their supervisors were often overwhelmed themselves, but the disconnect made their jobs more difficult, made them feel more isolated, and reinforced some of their insecurities. One participant said, “I know there’s intention of support, but not intentional planning for support.” Another new leader candidly stated, “I don't know how to tell the person that's supervising me that I feel like I suck, and I just need some honest feedback.” They felt better communication, consistency in messaging and focus, more articulated systems, and regular interactions would greatly help them in their leadership roles.

Although contemplation of these stressors was sobering, each SLI participant discussed post-hire supports that would allow them continued growth, increased effectiveness, and

ultimately improve their well-being. These post hire supports were coded 317 times over the course of the dialogues. The iterative process led to the identification of five main areas of support categorized with the following sub-codes: teams and colleagues in like-positions, district supports, continuing cohorts and university professional development, retreats, and mentors and coaches. Table 4.2 outlines the number of times participants referred to key post-hire supports.

Table 4.2

Coding of Post-Hire Supports

Characteristic	References
Teams & colleagues in like-positions	93
District supports	37
Continuing cohorts & university professional development	28
Retreats	61
Mentors & coaches	90

Teams and Colleagues in Like-Positions

Participants' discussions around teams and colleagues in like-positions emerged as a sub-code with contrasting experiences and feelings from both sides of the support spectrum. Participants engaged in a significant discussion about the isolation that many new leaders felt in their positions. They expressed the need to have a network of colleagues in like-positions who would not judge them and they could confide in or a team with whom they could process. When leaders were faced with the 12 stressors outlined above in their day-to-day work without a trusted colleague or team, they were more likely to use words such as isolated, loneliness, unsure, struggling, burn out, and alone. This isolation led many of the participants to mention that they began to wonder if it was just them who was struggling so intensely. They began to question their own efficacy with statements such as, "Is it just me?" or "Is anybody else dealing

with this or is it only me?” A new principal’s feelings of isolation were apparent as he talked about his “sense of loneliness: I don’t have an AP. I don’t have a team. I don’t have a team.” Another participant shared, “So, so often we’re alone.” Frequently, participants repeated that as new leaders, they needed a thought partner as well as someone to assure them that they “can do this,” “it will be okay,” or “keep going, it will be okay.”

On the other side of the support spectrum, on many occasions when new administrators felt they could weather another conflict, pass through a difficult period, or have the right answer to a problem, it was often due to having the support of colleagues in like-positions or a team. In fact, of all the post-hire supports coded, participants discussed the most the need of having the support of a team or of colleagues in like-positions. When broaching the subject of colleagues in like-positions and teams, SLI participants were particularly open and vulnerable in their conversations. Although many expressed insecurities about their leadership skills or newness to the work they were encountering, there was not a sense of hopelessness and isolation. Participants felt that when they did have a trusted colleague or team to talk to and process with, they could work through most situations and have confidence in the outcome. For many, the need was in the opportunity to talk with people facing the same challenges as themselves and having meaningful conversations around problems of practice while learning from each other’s perspectives and experiences. One participant described it as “a nice blanket of support around me;” whereas, another said, “There’s safety in hearing somebody else say, ‘I’m struggling with that too.’” One new leader discussed the importance of his team by saying:

There’s just no way I could do it without my team. I don’t like the idea of making big decisions in isolation. I may have the idea, I may know what I want to do with it, but I want to run it by two or three people and make sure that my thinking is in line with our values and who we want to be and what we’re trying to do as a school. And it’s just too easy for me to get stuck in my own thinking. . . . [Instead] I’ve got to check myself and talk to somebody. And have a team that understands why I’m doing that. It’s not because

I'm feeling incompetent or incapable, but [I] know we're smarter together than we are when alone. . . . I couldn't work in a building where we're independent contractors within our offices. Period. Can't do it.

Another participant said:

It again goes around to your support system like the individuals around you. I think a lot of what we do is mental—and keeping your mind right, I guess. Like surrounding yourself with people who are going to keep your mind right. Like bring you up when you need to be brought up and pull you down when you need to be pulled down. And I think as leaders, it's very important that we are strategic and specific on who we have around us. Because all of us have different styles. We all have different ways of doing things. But you also need those people around you to help you grow and keep you mentally stable.

Colleagues in like-positions and teams helped new administrators cope with loneliness, provided other perspectives and experience, and supplied real-time supports in a crisis or weighty situation. New leaders with this type of support system were likely to use words such as “relationship,” “resources,” “support,” “helpful,” “perspective,” “beneficial,” “discussions,” “care,” “importance,” “reassurance,” “laugh,” “strengths,” “growth,” and “connection.”

District Supports

SLI participants reported an array of district-level supports deemed necessary to help shore up their work as new leaders. Two suggestions were discussed most often, access to mental health professionals and effective induction programs; however, there were suggestions which surfaced on multiple occasions and are worthy to note. Participants suggested a structure for more regular and intentional access to their direct, out-of-building supervisors. Based on the size and configuration of the districts, these supervisory positions included superintendents, assistant superintendents, and head principals. Additionally, participants talked of the overwhelming nature of their jobs and the inability to cover so many responsibilities. There was general consensus regarding the need for districts to approve more administrative positions to help with workload relief. As previously reported, a pressing example of the concerning workload was the

sheer volume of staff they are required to supervise. Participants discussed that they were not aware of other corporations or industries that had such significant requirements for employee oversight, coupled with such a high ratio of supervisees to supervisors. Another suggestion by these new leaders was that many times their buildings or departments seemed to work in isolation within their districts and they would have appreciated structures that facilitated collaborative work across these groups. Participants felt that such structures would facilitate learning from one another, provide better outcomes, and reduce the amount of work redundancy across their organizations.

In multiple focus groups, participants expressed a desire for districts to provide administrators with access to mental health professionals. This stemmed from the need to process work-related trauma and to have someone who could help them with coping skills and process events. One participant said:

I want something in place so that the principals get counseling sessions—whether they asked for [it] or not, because I needed that really bad my first year when a girl was ran over by a bus. We had weapons in school. We had sexting. [A student] almost died on the floor of my office from a drug overdose. I sat and watched. I was not prepared for that. And then to get yelled at about it by a parent in the aftermath or whatever. I wasn't prepared for that. It was overwhelming.

One caveat to this request was the desire to have the mental health professionals be independent of the district so participating administrators had confidence the content of their visits would be confidential and not create concerns for supervisors.

The single most discussed post-hire district support SLI participants requested was a meaningful and effective induction program for new educational leaders. Even though they recognized going into their positions that at some point ongoing support needed to shift from their university licensure programs to the districts, they were not prepared for a significant lack of intentional support from their school districts. One participant stated, “At some point the

[university] program has to hand off the people to the districts. The districts have to take this stuff on. I just think [there is] pretty mixed experiences with how their district mentorship and induction works.” For most participants, their experience with district-level support transitioning into their new roles was significantly lacking and many felt it consisted of, “Here you go. Here’s the keys.”

Although participants observed many districts were getting better at teacher induction, many noted a serious lack of targeted, intentional leadership induction. In reflecting on how districts could better retain leaders, a participant felt a strong induction program would communicate, “Here’s what we are going to do to help you in your new role and try to keep you here for a long time.” Many expressed frustration that due to a lack of onboarding, they recreated systems and processes which had already been developed. They regularly expressed, “Why didn’t someone show me this?” A lack of intentional onboarding led to ineffective efforts, wasted time, considerable frustration, and incorrect decisions or actions being taken due to unawareness or inexperience. Discussion in this area highlighted a large, urban district in the state that offered a robust leadership induction in the form of internships. This program provided recent graduates of principal licensure programs an opportunity to grow their skills and understand the district’s system under the tutelage of an experienced educational leader. Upon completion of this induction program, these new leaders were placed in their first assignments and given additional levels of support. Although this was seen as a “perfect world” scenario and desirable across all districts, SLI participants felt even a focused, intentional onboarding program would be a significant improvement from what was currently available to a majority of new educational leaders in their region.

Continuing Cohorts and University Professional Development

SLI participants felt their school districts needed to provide more effective and intentional post-hire supports, yet there was a general consensus from participants that access to ongoing professional development from their university principal licensure program, and facilitated opportunities for their cohorts to gather and learn together, would also provide much needed assistance in their first years as educational leaders. One participant offered:

I think that some follow-up after the program is over [is needed]. And I don't know if that's just for people who have been employed in administrative roles, or if it's for everybody. I would think it's for people who are sure that they want to continue on. . . . I just felt a little bit like I was kind of lost at sea that first year.

As this participant explained, continued university involvement in supporting novice K-12 educational leaders in their professional development is most acute during that first year of transition to their new leadership role.

A topic of meaningful conversation for participants was the opportunity to reconvene their cohort after graduation from the principal licensure program. The most prominent cited reasonings for such events were a reconvening for targeted professional development, reflective dialogues, and social networking opportunities. They spoke of the opportunity to gather to “work and gain experience together,” to “be more reflective than you probably would be when you're just doing your day-to-day work,” and “to think of the big picture items that are really important.” Participants saw the importance of reconnecting in order to have a social setting with people who understood what they were going through, but also to engage a group who would help their growth as professionals and provide a resource into the future as questions would arise in their work responsibilities. They recognized it was likely impossible for a university to continue a single cohort’s perpetual reconvening, but as more and more cohorts graduated over

time, there seemed to be a sense the first few years post-graduation were most needful for this support.

One participant in a session anchored their discussion by asking, “What does professional development need look like for people in their first three years?” Participants desired to have ongoing, targeted professional development from the university after being hired as leaders in their school districts. Participants’ discussion around this support identified two approaches to deliver this professional development. The first approach was a seminar format of smaller duration than a university semester course where key skill sets could be identified and gatherings arranged to learn together in classes. The relevancy of this learning would be enhanced as participants could immediately go to their respective positions and practice the skills learned. Supervision and evaluation, coaching teachers, crisis planning, master schedules, and work-life balance were a few of the ideas discussed as possible topics. Participants also mentioned consideration for cohort members who had not yet landed leadership jobs and the desire to have seminars focused on securing such positions. The second format for on-going university professional development was to provide classes offering university credit, at a discounted tuition rate, focused on practicing administrators in an area such as school law. SLI participants felt these ongoing university ties would help the transition into, and through, their first years as educational leaders.

Retreats

Across focus groups, participants commented on the importance of having retreats like the School Leadership Institute as a needed support. Participants indicated that this would be helpful in their first years as administrators, but many expressed an interest in having continuing access to such a program for some time into the future. Two main themes emerged from the

conversations on retreats. The first was the importance of a retreat for self-care and re-grounding. The second was the ability to focus on improvement in ways they are unable to do while in the overwhelming, day-to-day responsibilities in which they were usually engaged.

These new leaders commented on the need to be with people in like situations for support and recognition that they are not alone. One participant said, “There's safety in hearing somebody else say, ‘I'm struggling with that too.’” Another participant said the SLI retreat created “a space or a forum to be vulnerable and to be safe,” and a place where they could “say what they need to say and ask what they need to ask—that's what you need.” Participants commented on the structure of the SLI which allowed them to engage in important leadership learning, but just as importantly, SLI provided unstructured time to share meals together, get a drink, and socialize in settings that were natural and unscripted. This was a chance for many to reengage members of their cohorts, create or strengthen friendships, and help them remember the power of those cohort relationships. An SLI participant stated, “It [was] starting to feel like the cohort idea to me [was] a distant memory, until I come here and then it comes back.”

Some SLI participants came because they needed self-care. They recognized they spent so much time caring for others, they needed to have some self-care if they were going to continue in the work. They found the SLI provided a chance to step away and help them on multiple levels. One participant observed:

I can see this environment being helpful for me . . . this kind of self-care-type thing. The retreat, the rejuvenation, the reflection, after doing this, I think that might be the thing . . . I'm kind of looking for now.

Participants felt that these types of opportunities in a retreat setting was an essential “re-grounding.” One participant said, “I feel refreshed having some of the conversations I've had that

I think I've avoided having.” They spoke of mental, social, emotional, and physical rejuvenation that came from the SLI retreat.

Another way the SLI helped the participants was to provide a space for reflection and clarity on what they needed to return and do. Time was set aside where they could discuss problems of practice with others new to instructional leadership as well as receive feedback on ideas they were interested in implementing. For some, it was a sense of being able to step out of their busy responsibilities and reflect through meaningful activities. It was time they could step away from the trees to better see the forest through the trees because SLI helped “carve out space to be reflective,” one participant shared, and time to “really kind of process things that happened today, this year, last month,” another participant reflected. Participants spoke of the necessity of time to reflect on “your career, and where you're at, and what space you're at, and where you want to go.”

A frequently discussed concern about SLI was the ability for it to be a sustainable program into the future. Participants wondered where ongoing funding for such a retreat would come from and if it was an ongoing option, who would be able to plan and execute the retreat? They also worried how long they could participate in SLI as each year another cohort would graduate and desire admittance to the retreat. However, despite potential hurdles and questions to be addressed, participants felt a sustainable SLI program would be a much-desired, post-hire support because participation in the program, as one participant noted, was “like centering yourself.”

Mentors and Coaches

One of the most discussed post-hire supports SLI participants desired was access to mentors and coaches. Although these two positions have some overlap in responsibilities,

participants tended to describe two different roles. For the purpose of clarity, a mentor is defined here as someone with whom they worked, usually inside the system, who tended to be practicing administrators with buildings or departments of their own. A mentor can be part of a formal arrangement by a supervisor or program, or they can be part of an informal arrangement where a new leader has reached out to build a relationship with a more experienced leader. SLI participants described a different role which is defined here as a coach. A coach would be a resource provided to the administrator from outside the system and one who mentored administrators as the primary function of their job.

For many new leaders, mentors play an important role in helping to understand and execute the day-to-day work of leading a building or department. Mentors provide a needed guide to functioning within the culture and practices of the organization while helping figure out the “how” in many situations. Participants spoke of mentors as someone they could reach out to in a crisis by describing it as “real-time support” and “hot-line assistance.” Describing this type of support, a participant said:

I do feel like what's been very beneficial is having so much experience around me because all of them have 15-plus years in the administrator profession. So just all of [those issues] coming at me and me being in my first year, it's a really nice—I guess, it's a nice little blanket of support under me.

Many participants recalled specific wisdom or support their mentors gave to them which they continued to use. As they spoke, it was evident these interactions with mentors were meaningful because of the significant influence those interactions had on the development of their leadership philosophies. Some of the best experiences came from mentors with a mindset that their responsibility was to train their future replacement. This mindset led the mentor to involve and support the mentee in a wide array of situations instead of just providing them with some responsibilities that were loosely monitored.

For participants, district mentorship programs were either hit or miss depending on the system they were in or the mentor they were assigned. Programs were more successful when structures and expectations were in place for mentors. District mentor programs were a good step in supporting new leaders, but participants spoke of a desire for something more. They appreciated in-district formal and informal mentors and the expertise and experience many mentors brought to their support, but participants wanted more opportunities for guidance: They wanted ongoing coaching.

A common discussion during focus groups was opportunities for coaching support from someone outside of their district, not someone connected in any way with the system's supervisors or evaluation process. One participant said, "There were just days when I felt like I needed to talk to somebody outside of my building. It helped to just go outside of my school district." There was concern that if they were truly going to be open with their struggles and areas for growth, this information could get back to supervisors if internal mentors were used. One participant questioned: "Am I saying it to the wrong person? Can I really say what I feel? I really need some help with this." They wanted coaches with years of administrative experience and practice who they could use as a resource for more than emergencies. They wanted to have someone they could reflect and plan with. In one focus group, a participant asked a poignant question, "We have instructional coaches for teachers: Why not something for principals?"

Others observed the higher their position in educational leadership, the few "scaffolds" and supports were available to help them. Participants discussed how important coaching is for leaders in their first three years, and one asked, "What are we doing for leadership retention?" Most participants felt like little was being done, and coaching could go a long way in retaining new leaders and helping them be successful in new roles. Again, though they were grateful for

the previously mentioned internal mentoring relationships, the general feeling was they needed more. They desired an intentional plan for growth and retention through coaching. The discussions revealed that the coaching need can be broken into two main components: a need for professional coaching and a desire for coaching that supports self-care.

SLI participants noted it was not possible for a university to completely prepare a new leader for the many challenges of educational leadership. As new scenarios arose for participants, they wished for someone they could consult with to build an approach to working through a problem or for someone to help them debrief and learn from an experience. Participants identified multiple ways in which a coach could provide insight by helping with big-picture thinking, processing situations, debriefing and readjusting practices, being a sounding board for ideas, challenging thinking, and providing ongoing accountability. Participants wanted someone who would provide authentic feedback but worried the higher they went in an organization, the fewer people there are who are willing to challenge thinking or voice concerns. As one participant shared, they wanted feedback that could “help me figure out where my strengths are and help me figure out where my areas of growth are rather than just telling me what I'm good at.” Participants believed a coach could provide this type of feedback to help them improve.

The findings showed a second coaching focus deemed important was to support the administrator with personal self-care strategies. Most participants discussed that they were taking care of so many people in their leadership roles but were failing to take care of themselves. They often felt guilty taking time to care for themselves, while at the same time knowing they would be happier and better able to care for others if they did. They spoke of gaining weight, stopping exercise regimens, increasingly poor diets, lack of sleep, and lacking enjoyment in activities that refreshed and renewed them. They felt coaches could help with well-being by checking in and

holding them accountable for self-care practices and goals. One new leader said, “I would want somebody to ask me [how I am doing]. I want somebody to diagnose where I'm going to burn myself out.” For multiple participants, they felt extra support in taking care of themselves would make a difference.

While discussing mentors and coaches, participants expressed concerns regarding both of these models of post-hire support. For new leaders, there was a sense of guilt asking a mentor to help them, knowing they were likely already too busy with their own responsibilities. The relationship lent itself to having the mentee feeling that they were constantly taking, and it was sometimes intimidating to reach out to the mentor. Some mentioned that they only reached out to a mentor with emergencies so as not to burden them. This left many with a feeling that they only had this resource in times of crisis and did not permit a relationship that fostered deeper learning. Participants also felt that because their in-district mentors were often busy with their own work, mentoring interactions tended to be sporadic and unfocused. Participants mentioned that they would be much more likely to reach out to a coach on a variety of issues knowing it was the person's primary focus and responsibility. The most significant concern regarding a model of coaching support was the cost. Participants were concerned there was not a way to pay for ongoing coaching solely from their own site budgets.

When considering new leaders' longevity in the profession, it is important to understand the stressors new leaders are under as well as the post-hire supports they believe will best assist them. Participants of SLI were asked questions that facilitated discussions centered on new leader retention and post-hire supports. The next section overlaps these ideas and segues into the discussion of new leaders continuing in the work.

The Future: Continuing in the Work

Over the course of the 12 focus group discussions, SLI participants shared why they might leave their positions as educational leaders, and what they would need in order to continue in their professional roles, which was termed, “continuing in the work.” SLI focus group discussions emphasized the past, present, or future, but participants’ natural conversations blurred these lines as they regularly discussed topics stressed in other sessions. As participants considered their future and what would help them stay in the field of educational administration, they often referenced the stressors previously reported in the past or the present. Of note while studying this data, the researcher observed how often participants discussed the need for coping and self-care strategies in order to persist in the profession. Due to the prolific nature of this discussion point, 122 references, coping and self-care was given a unique category within the findings of continuing in the work. Originally, the plan for writing this section was to focus on factors that would cause one to leave the profession and factors that would contribute to one staying in the profession. However, as the data was examined, the researcher determined that those factors were two sides of the same coin. For example, if a leader felt they were supported, they would stay. If a leader did not feel supported, they would seek to leave for a different position or career. Instead of breaking these factors into two separate categories, they were examined as two parts of a whole.

As data were examined for this section, the researcher found data to mirror previous outcomes regarding stressors and post-hire supports reported earlier in this paper. This consistency in data lent credibility to the narrative and findings. This section of the paper did not attempt to cover an in-depth understanding of information already presented. Repetitive findings were mentioned, and new data provided additional depth and richness to the narrative already

provided. This section addresses additional coping and self-care findings followed by keys for persisting in the profession. Table 4.3 outlines the number of times participants referred to key characteristics needed to continue in the work.

Table 4.3

Coding of Continuing in the Work

Characteristic	References
Stressors	176
Coping & Self-Care	122
Persisting in the Profession	156

Coping and Self-Care

Access to coping and self-care strategies had a significant impact on whether SLI participants thought they could stay in their respective roles or districts. In order to continue in the work, participants felt some coping and self-care strategies would need to be in place for any foreseeable longevity. While they spoke of their own needs, they advocated such strategies were vital to retaining educational leaders now and into the future. The most discussed concern continued to be a sense of not being in control of their personal lives. Participants discussed the physical, mental, and emotional toll the work had taken on them. Every participant seemed to struggle with this factor and recognized it was important; however, very few were able to implement a successful, intentional plan for dealing with a lack of self-care. With varying degrees of success, participants were able to make some inroads into self-care. The most frequently mentioned form of helpful self-care was support from their families at home and participating in activities that allowed them an escape from the emotional and mental rigors of their jobs. These activities included watching reality TV shows, physical labor such as chopping firewood, walking the dog, taking a walk or exercising, or making dinner with one of their

children. For some, it was small battles they won such as not falling asleep while reading one of their children a bedtime story. Counseling support, as mentioned previously, was discussed as being a potentially big benefit for getting help.

The importance of healthy interpersonal relationships as part of self-care and coping was another reoccurring theme previously reported. At work this took the shape of strong, in-building leadership teams and colleagues in like positions who could be depended on. One participant leader stated, “What helps me sleep at night, is [to] know that I have the people around me to help me.” In their personal life, they expressed the need for friends and social groups. In work settings, they spoke of the importance of humor and laughter as key to coping with stress. Many, however, struggled to maintain friendships due to the demands of the job. This left them feeling lonely and vulnerable. One new leader articulated their feelings by saying, “I just feel I’m getting lonelier and more isolated, I guess, which I know is not healthy.”

Participants repeatedly discussed the need for improved discrete skillsets for administrator longevity. Many of the skills they highlighted were those reported earlier regarding university program improvement and possible topics for ongoing seminars and professional development. However, there was a sub-set of skills discussed that will be termed here as self-management. This skillset could be discussed in a university class, but likely not effectively learned until the individual is in an actual leadership position. Some of these self-management skills included time management, calendaring, prioritizing, and personal accountability. The self-management skill most discussed was labeled by one leader as “passion with boundaries.” These new leaders were passionate about their work, but a common theme among participants was the overwhelming nature of their responsibilities and the sense that they were always on-call. With technologies such as email, smartphones, texts, and social media, leaders felt they were always

available to others. Though each spoke about the importance of their work and their love for it, the inability to turn off and tune out became increasingly difficult for them. Some had developed ways to minimize a 24-hour flow of worry and work, but most were still struggling to set boundaries allowing them time to step away and rejuvenate. They needed to find balance and put in appropriate boundaries.

SLI participants also identified how others perceived them and how they perceived themselves as important to coping and self-care. One participant shared, “I can't control their perception. I can do my best to be above board on everything, but I can't control their perception all the time.” Many participants were worried about interactions with staff or supervisors and that they would make a decision that would disappoint or “let them down.” They worried as leaders that their actions were now “affecting more people, bigger systems, bigger things,” as one participant explained. Participants spent a significant amount of time reflecting on the stress they put themselves under. They recognized they were not superheroes but felt they needed to live up to that standard. They worried that people would not follow them, and supervisors would be disappointed in them if they were human. One participant stated, “I cannot live up to [the] expectation. That's just such a frustrating recipe. It just means that I'm going to let somebody down at some point, people, because I'm finite.” Participants discussed that a key to helping leaders break this cycle was to have a supervisor, principal or superintendent, who did not just talk about it being acceptable and understandable to make mistakes and take care of yourself, but a supervisor who actually set the example in doing both. Many participants realized if they were going to be administrators for any length of time, they needed to learn some important self-care qualities for how to treat themselves. Participants talked about the need to develop characteristics such as humility, grace, and patience. Even though they regularly showed these virtues to others,

they realized the need to give more to themselves. The spoke of needing to learn to accept who they were and to “be themselves” as leaders, not reimagining themselves as someone else’s image of a leader. Part of the realization was that they could not do it all themselves, and they needed to be better at letting others shoulder part of the load. They felt these realizations and accompanying practices would reduce some self-induced stress.

Persisting in the Profession

Beyond coping and self-care strategies, data from the SLI focus groups indicated key components for administrators to persist in the profession. Post-hire supports such as teams and colleagues in like-positions, meaningful induction programs, work-load relief, mental health counseling, continued professional development, retreats, mentors, and coaches were emphasized in focus group discussions and reported earlier in this chapter. These previously reported supports are needed for leaders to be effective in their work; however, they are mentioned in this section on persisting in the profession because the very act of K-12 districts providing these resources to new leaders sends a clear signal they have the support of their supervisors and district. Knowing that someone “has their back,” as one participant stated, was a key point from this data regarding leadership retention. Participants on multiple occasions said they needed to know they were surrounded by support and they were working for and with likeminded principals, superintendents, and board members who had similar values. One leader said, “What would keep me here is continued support. I feel super supported and trusted by my superintendent, and the principals around me, and the school board.” Such supports signaled they were cared for and valued, something voiced across the focus groups. The participants acknowledged they provided regular care and concern for others but often did not get it in return. Without it, they faced a demanding job with significant stressors and intensity. One participant

said, “I don’t know how long I can be a fireman just putting out fires.” Others stated that without support, they would not be able to stay in their current positions.

Two other reasons to remain in K-12 leadership emerged from the focus group discussions: interaction with students and a desire to grow. Although they were not mentioned as frequently, these were powerful motivators in continuing in the work. The work is demanding, yet participants found great satisfaction in their service to children and youth. This provided a sense that they were doing something meaningful that would ultimately have a positive impact on the students in their buildings or districts. The second reason was a desire to continue to grow and be stretched. Participants felt that if they got to a point in their current positions where they became “stagnant,” quit growing, or lacked being challenged by the work, they would likely look for a new position that would provide those things.

One of the biggest reasons participants indicated they would leave their roles as educational leaders was if they believed the toll was becoming too high for their family. One participant said, “I think [a reason to leave] would be just watching my kids and assessing if they are starting to lose their dad. Then it's not worth it to me. I'll go work at [a ski resort].” Only twice did a leader say they likely could not leave administration because they needed the higher salary to support a family; most indicated a willingness to walk away if they could not change the current course and impact on spouses and children. The toll on some of these leaders was evident as one disclosed:

[It is] just the amount of emotional energy that I expend. It doesn't leave me with much. And I've just really seen, like when I'm home, I've just seen a change in myself at home. I know I'm in my first year as we transition, so I'm trying to just let myself off the hook and just accept that that's the way it is. But I think long term, by next year, if I'm not feeling a change where I actually have some energy to pour out to my kids and wife, where I'm just not living well in my home and serving well, and I'm just kind of crawling home and eating some food and crawling into bed, [I would leave].

The need to have meaningful work with a moral purpose for persisting in the profession was the final point most frequently discussed by participants. Participants had a need to feel that they were making a difference in the lives of students and staff. Some of their greatest frustrations that caused them to consider leaving their roles was feeling that they were too busy with unimportant duties that filled their time and stole their attention. One leader talked through these feelings by saying:

If I ever felt like what I was doing wasn't making a difference, the rest wouldn't be worth it. I feel like I can handle a lot as long as I know I accomplished something, or we're moving in a progressive forward movement. But at whatever point I feel like that's not happening anymore, I would struggle for sure because I mean, yeah, long hours, all the emotional burden. What would you be taking it on for at that point?

SLI participants discussed how little time they had to spend working with and coaching teachers. They felt that not enough time was spent on instructional leadership that made a difference in their buildings or district, which was the main reason they wanted to become educational leaders. One participant stated:

If I could shift from working on so much of the process procedure and law and compliance type things and really work on teaching and learning, which is my passion, seeing kids grow—that would be great. That would fulfill my need that I don't have right now.

Another participant used an analogy to describe his feelings by comparing the difference between a gardener, who grows beautiful plants, and an Environmental Protection Agent, who regulates the environment. He explained that working with staff and students is like being the gardener. He then stated:

There is somebody else that's probably more wired to administrate, and manage, and keep a system running. And that's what I mentioned about the gardener versus the EPA agent. I'm a good policyholder, but the gardening is really what I'm excited about. So, I'm fueled by passion more than money. And so, if that passion is drying up, then I have no hesitancy to even look at where to go next year.

Participants' lack of ability to focus on what truly mattered or to make a meaningful impact was discouraging and produced frustration. Instructional leadership gave them a sense of meaningful purpose, relevancy, and credibility to the staff they were trying to serve. They craved what one participant explained as "passion for their work" and service that "feeds the soul." It was important for them to take time to reflect on the hard, meaningful work that they were doing and to know, as a participant shared, they were "making decisions which were right for kids." Participants took pride in this type of work that buoyed them up when things were hard. Instructional leadership and making a difference in the lives of students, which differed from the world of constant discipline, upset parents, and email, engaged and motivated these new leaders to continue in the work.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the School Leadership Institute (SLI) study and the major findings obtained from data presented in Chapter Four. A summary of significant findings is provided here in the hope that it will help key decision makers at the university and K-12 school district levels identify needed preparations and supports to retain and develop novice educational leaders. Additionally, this chapter contains recommendations for action and for future research.

Summary of the Study

A variety of stakeholders at the local, state, and national levels continue to increase pressure on school leaders by asking more of K-12 educational systems. While demands of the job continue to increase, so do the harmful stressors accompanying these responsibilities (Riley, 2018). Though these pressures are pervasive across educational leadership roles, they are particularly acute for novice leaders in their first three years of the work (Mushaandja, 2013). In addition to the regular demands of these positions, these leaders are new to their responsibilities and are still seeking to grasp the basics of a complicated and dynamic profession (Friedman, 2002). Pervasive novice leadership turnover (Johnson, 2005; Mitgang & Gill, 2012; NASSP, 2017; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011; School Leadership Network, 2014, 2019) coupled with decreasing interest in leadership positions (Pounder & Merrill, 2001) is considered a significant threat to the well-being and future of K-12 education.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify promising practices school districts and university partners can implement to improve the development and retention of novice

educational leaders. The research was designed to explore if retention could best be accomplished through a continuum of preparation and supports provided by these partners during the first three years of a new leader's role. The following questions guided the inquiry:

1. How did graduates of a principal licensure program describe key elements in their preparation to become practicing educational leaders and what did they identify as key elements missing in that preparation?
2. What post-hire supports do graduates of a principal licensure program perceive as important in their first three years in an administrative role?
3. What supports would make a difference for new educational leaders to persist in school leadership?

Methodology Review

In order to understand the promising practices that might best support novice educational leaders, it was important to create a shared understanding of their needs and experiences during the first three years in their new responsibilities. This shared understanding by SLI participants would provide vital information to make informed decisions that better support the development and retention of novice educational leaders. To best achieve these outcomes, this study was conducted through a qualitative approach based on constructivist epistemology and phenomenological methodology. The research strategy consisted of a field study involving educators in their first three years in leadership roles. These novice leaders participated in a leadership institute provided by a major university located in the Intermountain West.

A case study was conducted beginning in 2017, by Dr. Donna Cooner and Dr. Wendy Fothergill at the School Leadership Institute in a retreat-type setting. SLI was created to provide resources and support to principal licensure graduates as they put their skills into practice in

recently acquired educational leadership roles. Two institute sessions were held in consecutive years, each with a different group of participants. Semi-structured interviews composed of four to five participants were held at each SLI retreat. Participants were invited to join three separate focus group discussions. Each of the three focus groups approached the dialogue through different lenses: past, present, and future. The goal of the focus groups was to better understand the participants' view points on their leadership preparation program, of supports in their first three years as educational leaders, and what would help them persist in the profession. Questions were asked in a semi-structured interview format and anchored the discussion for each focus group while allowing the conversations to have a natural rhythm and flow around the needs, ideas, and concerns of the participants. This format allowed us as researchers to hear the voice of participants and better understand their shared experiences. Each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed into a written file.

Data analysis was a multi-step, iterative process which included grounding, bracketing, initial work with the data, coding, reflection, synthesis, and reporting. During the process, I identified a total of 1,309 separate selections that were labeled and categorized under identified codes while looking for common themes. After repeated interactions with the transcripts, the coding process yielded three top-codes, 26 sub-codes, and eight tertiary-codes. Although each focus group tended to have a majority of their conversation anchored in either the past, present, or future as guided by the research questions, participants shared their experiences with a natural flow to conversations and with significant overlap in the three areas. The coding process identified these associations across discussions and focus groups: The past was primarily discussed in terms of participants' preparation program, the present was discussed in terms of

their need for support in their current positions, and the future centered around the idea of continuing in a leadership position.

Findings

This study contributes to the existing research by identifying a continuum of five preparations and supports that universities and K-12 school districts can use to retain and develop leaders new to their roles: (a) seven essential characteristics of a successful principal licensure program, (b) areas for improvement in university licensure programs, (c) 12 significant stressors facing novice leaders, (d) five post-hire supports deemed most needful; and (e) two areas of consideration for helping novice leaders persist in the profession. To summarize the SLI study, I will first review the findings confirmed in past studies in the area of K-12 leadership retention. Then the study's key findings will be summarized, including those that add to and contribute to the literature in this research area.

Findings in Context

Some findings of this study are presented here in the context of both the research questions that guided the inquiry and the information gleaned through the literature review contained in Chapter Two.

Research Question #1: The Past

The first research question was, "How did graduates of a principal licensure program describe key elements in their preparation to become practicing educational leaders and what did they identify as key elements missing in that preparation?" Research by Mitgang and Gill (2012) identified components essential to a successful principal preparation program. These components included preparation that moved beyond running a building to leading school change, the art of coaching teachers, the ability to understand systems thinking, and a shift from theoretical

constructs to actual practice and well-designed internships. The SLI research confirmed the work done by Mitgang and Gill as each of these components were independently identified by participants as being either meaningful factors in their own licensure program (i.e., leadership self-discovery, meaningful practice, and internships) or changes that they believed were needed for improvement of the program (i.e., discrete skills like coaching teachers and improvements to internships).

Hitt et al. (2012) recommended leadership programs contain: (a) structures and delivery models that use social networks; (b) continual cycles of assessment and feedback; (c) challenging, relevant, and standards-based curriculum; and (e) improved field experiences. Hitt et al.'s findings were also corroborated by this study as SLI participants identified cohorts and curriculum tied to the state's Principal Quality Standards (see Appendix A) as important. At the same time, SLI participants identified the need for improvement in a cycle of practice and feedback as well as field experiences that were more robust and intentional.

Research Question #2: The Present

The second question guiding this research was, "What post-hire supports do graduates of a principal licensure program perceive as important in their first three years in an administrative role?" SLI participants noted that a principal licensure program would be unable to teach every skill and prepare principal licensure students for every scenario a new educational leader would need after being hired. This confirmed similar findings by both Mushaandja (2013) and Beam et al. (2016) to show that the findings of these three studies point to the importance of robust, post-hire supports for novice leaders.

In regards to post-hire supports, one of the most significant findings of this study was the importance of teams and colleagues in like-positions. This supported the work done by multiple

researchers regarding the importance of social support for educational leaders (Beam et al., 2016; Beausaert et al., 2016; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Hitt et al., 2012; Sosyal et al., 2013; Tomic & Tomic, 2008). Having a network of colleagues to confide in and process with is vital for novice leaders' success and retention. This post-hire support provides better outcomes in work and improves the well-being of the leaders involved.

Three findings from the SLI research confirmed past studies regarding the necessity of district supports as post-hire needs. The first finding was the understanding that the workload of many educational leaders is unrealistic and there is a need for workload relief. This confirmed findings by multiple studies regarding the number of critical responsibilities leaders are tasked with in today's educational environments (Beausaert et al., 2016; Lemoine et al., 2018; Marzano et al., 2005; NAESP, 2013; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Sincar, 2013). The second finding confirmed previous studies on the need for district support by offering targeted resources and focused, intentional induction programs anchored in the context of the actual work (Beam et al., 2016; Cieminski, 2018; Fullan, 2008; Mitgang & Gill, 2012; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). The third corroborating finding was the need for novice leaders to have access to supervisors, as described by Beam et al. (2016).

Two additional findings of the SLI study also answered the second research question and confirmed past studies regarding post-hire supports. Participants expressed a need for a continued relationship with their principal preparation program. This post-hire support included ongoing opportunities to meet as a continuing cohort and to access additional seminars and university classes geared to practicing leaders. This coincided with findings of other studies (Barber et al., 2007; Beam et al., 2016; Beausaert et al., 2016; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Hitt et al., 2012; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Additionally, this study identified the need for mentorship

programs in order to support novice leaders, as reported by Beam et al. (2016) and Cieminski (2018).

Research Question #3: The Future

The third question that guided the SLI study was, “What supports would make a difference for new educational leaders to persist in school leadership?” Although many answers to this question came in the form of post-hire supports previously reported, this study identified additional considerations that corroborate findings in the literature review that can inform future efforts to retain novice leaders. There is a need to address the coping and self-care strategies and practices of novice leaders if they are to remain in their roles and continue in the work. Without coping and self-care strategies, the significant stressors inherent in their work are likely to lead to burnout, as described by Sosyal et al. (2013) and Beausaert et al. (2016). The SLI study identified 12 major stressors for novice leaders, of which nine—work volume, constancy of stress, social isolation, personal insecurities, negligible meaningful efforts, hostile parent behaviors, role intensity, weight of responsibilities, and disconnect with supervisors—were consistent with previous studies (Beam et al., 2016; Beausaert et al., 2016; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Friedman, 1995, 2002; NAESP, 2013; Queen & Schumacher, 2006; Riley, 2018; Sosyal et al., 2013). The coping and self-care supports required to navigate these stressors and retain novice leaders need to address the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of the individual.

Summary of Major Findings. As mentioned, the SLI study had three areas of focus: (a) preparation program characteristics (b) post-hire supports; and (c) continuing in the work that guided the description of the study’s findings as found in Chapter Four. These three areas also provide the format for reviewing the key findings of the study. The following section provides an

overall summary to facilitate and inform decisions by universities and K-12 districts in their work of retaining novice educational leaders.

Preparation Program Characteristics. SLI participants discussed multiple characteristics of a successful principal licensure program that answered the research question, “How did graduates of a principal licensure program describe key elements in their preparation to become practicing educational leaders and what did they identify as key elements missing in that preparation?” This study identified seven characteristics outlined in Table 5.1 deemed significant during focus group dialogues. Table 5.1 summarizes the key characteristics of a successful principal licensure program.

Table 5.1

Key Characteristics of a Successful Principal Licensure Program

Finding	Description	Key Considerations
Leadership Self-Discovery	Opportunities to create and/or refine their leadership identities.	<p>Identification of each person’s leadership skillsets, desires, beliefs, values, and “why.”</p> <p>Move from nebulous understanding of leadership to a more concrete understanding of <i>their</i> leadership style and practices.</p>
Preparation for Various Roles	Expand horizons by exposure to and preparation for a variety of building and district leadership roles and responsibilities.	<p>There is strength in a program that has principal licensure students and professors with a variety of backgrounds and experiences across K-12 education.</p> <p>Intentional exposure to and practice within various levels, settings, and systems prepares for multiple opportunities.</p>
Meaningful Practice	Lectures and readings are important, but opportunities to develop	Practice that creates tangible artifacts provides a familiar resource library for future needs.

	skills through scenarios, hands-on practice, and internships are valuable and strengthen and enhance learning.	Some ambiguity is okay in practice as it prepares for the ambiguity in future roles. Scenarios and internships are some of the most powerful forms of meaningful practice and should be foundational in a preparation program.
Access to Leaders	Opportunities to meet and learn from practicing administrators provides exposure to varied experiences and styles.	Specific examples and scenarios shared by practitioners helps principal licensure students process and prepare for future roles. Supports the process of leadership self-discovery.
Getting the Job	Moving beyond just meeting the overall licensure qualifications to helping graduating principal licensure students secure their first leadership positions.	Preparation and practice for the interview process helps candidates be better equipped and confident for the experience. The use of portfolios as a culminating activity prepares candidates for interviews.
Discrete Skills	There is a set of discrete skills new administrators deem most vital to their first years on the job.	Identified skills deemed vital should be a focus of licensure programs. Not all skills necessary for successful educational leadership can be taught in a program and must be supported post-hire through partnerships with K-12 school districts.
The Cohort	The use of a cohort model provides meaningful collaborative system of support and learning during and after the licensure program.	A cohort system supports candidates' preparation for a variety of roles and responsibilities. The relational nature of an in-person cohort provides inherent development and support not available through separated classes or many on-line programs.

The study also identified three themes that SLI participants considered necessary in a principal licensure program for better graduate preparation. The first theme focused on greater depth in discrete skills such as student discipline, school law—particularly special education law—hiring and termination practices, how to effectively coach teachers and adult learners, handling conflict and difficult people, and staff evaluation practices. The second theme was modifications to some learning and delivery models. Participants believed it was important to have more hands-on scenarios that included a feedback and practice loop to allow principal licensure students to refine and enhance their skillsets. The third theme focused on overall programmatic considerations including hiring faculty with recent ties to practice and school districts, better preparation of leaders being shadowed for internship experiences, greater focus on preparation for assistant principal and dean roles, and opportunities for cohort groups to gather to maintain and foster relationships.

Post-Hire Supports. The SLI study identified 12 major stressors for new leaders: work volume, constancy of stress, dysfunctional systems, social isolation, personal insecurities, negligible meaningful efforts, hostile parent behaviors, role intensity, deficient personal care, staff pushback, the weight of responsibilities, and disconnect with supervisors. An understanding of these stressors by school districts is critical to knowing how to effectively provide post-hire supports to novice leaders in the field.

The study also identified five main themes of post-hire support needed to help novice leaders learn and shoulder their new roles (see Table 5.1). In addition to helping novice leaders successfully transition into these roles, post-hire supports are vital to retaining these leaders. These supports assist in answering the research question, “What post-hire supports do graduates of a principal licensure program perceive as important in their first three years in an

administrative role?” Table 5.2 summarizes the key post-hire supports districts should provide novice educational leaders.

Table 5.2

Key Post-Hire Supports

Finding	Description	Key Considerations
Teams & Colleagues in Like-Positions	Having a network of colleagues to confide in and process with.	<p>Leaders with teams and colleagues are less likely to feel isolated, unsure, or burned out.</p> <p>Teams and colleagues are important as thought partners for processing issues and coming to solid decisions.</p> <p>Trusted colleagues often provide emotional support, confidence, and encouragement.</p>
District Supports	Resources provided to novice leaders which support their ongoing growth and success in the field.	<p>Access to mental health professionals can help novice leaders process work related trauma.</p> <p>Structured and intentional access to district supervisors on an ongoing basis provides novice leaders with regular feedback and communication channels.</p> <p>Districts need to evaluate the workload of educational leaders and provide additional staff to support unrealistic workloads.</p> <p>Better communication and coordination across a district would facilitate interdepartmental learning and support and reduce work redundancy.</p> <p>Meaningful and effective induction programs are imperative for novice</p>

		leaders and current practices need to be evaluated and reformed.
Continuing Cohorts & University Professional Development	K-12 school districts and university principal licensure programs should continue joint partnerships to support novice leader professional development post-graduation.	<p>Reconvene cohort groups post-graduation for targeted professional development, reflective dialogues, and networking opportunities.</p> <p>Universities could provide reduced hour, semester classes focused on the needs of practicing administrators.</p> <p>University partners should provide smaller seminars focused on key, discrete skill-sets.</p>
Retreats	Provide a supportive environment for novice leaders to reconnect with their purpose, work, and other practitioners.	<p>Leaders can access retreats for self-care and grounding.</p> <p>Retreats provide a space for leaders to focus on big picture planning away from day-to-day operations and demands.</p>
Mentors and Coaches	Assistance from experienced practitioners to guide and support novice leaders as they encounter new and unfamiliar situations.	<p>Though different roles, both mentors and coaches provide valuable supports to novice leaders.</p> <p>A mentor is part of a formal or informal arrangement designed to help understand and execute the day-to-day work of leadership.</p> <p>A coach has the primary role to grow the skills and capacities of the novice leader, while supporting their self-care, through reflection, planning, and accountability.</p> <p>For novice leaders to feel comfortable with complete openness while being coached, a coach from</p>

outside of the organization and supervisory chain is preferred.

Continuing in the Work. Over the course of the 12 focus groups, SLI participants discussed what they needed in order to persist in the profession as they answered the research question, “What supports would make a difference for new educational leaders to persist in school leadership?” A significant portion of those discussions focused on the need for coping and self-care strategies. For this reason, it stands as its own finding. In addition to coping and self-care, the study identified other themes deemed important for novice leaders to continue in the work. Table 5.2 summarizes the key points to help novice leaders with coping and self-care, as well as considerations to support them in continuing in the work.

Table 5.3

Keys to Coping and Self-Care & Continuing in the Work

Finding	Description	Key Considerations
Coping & Self-Care	Supports that provide for the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of leaders.	<p>Though novice leaders know that self-care is important, they often need supports and accountability to plan and implement a successful care regimen.</p> <p>A significant strategy for coping is to have teams and colleagues in like-positions to offer support.</p> <p>Leader need continued professional development around self-management strategies.</p> <p>Support in setting appropriate boundaries is needed for administrator longevity.</p> <p>A significant area to address for novice leaders is their concerns about people’s perceptions of their</p>

leadership and worries they will let others down.

Continuing in the Work

In addition to post-hire supports, service to others, continued growth, meaningful work and moral purpose are reasons new leaders are willing and able to persist in the profession.

When novice leaders are provided post-hire supports, it is a clear indication they have the support of their supervisors and district.

A significant consideration for leaving a leadership role is negative impacts on their family.

Leaders want to be involved in work that improves circumstances for others and gives an opportunity for instructional leadership.

When leadership roles devolve into simply managing day-to-day operations and unimportant duties that steal time and attention, leaders become discouraged and frustrated.

Unexpected Findings

As I went through the data analysis process, I encountered some unexpected findings and correlations that I want to highlight. The most significant surprise in the data was how often, and across how many groups, the idea of direct mental health counseling for leaders was discussed as a needed post-hire support. Even though some districts have counseling support available to all employees as part of an insurance benefit, I have not encountered counseling as a direct support provided by school districts to leaders to serve as a coping and self-care strategy. Another unexpected finding was that salaries and advancement were not main considerations for leaving a leadership position. In fact, salary and advancement were each only mentioned twice as a consideration. Perhaps this was due to the nature of the conversations, or are considered of larger importance as an individual or family are contemplating career choices, but it did not register in

this study as a cause for leaving leadership positions. One correlation did appear to be a consideration for leaving, and it was not stressors that seemed to determine if a leader stayed or considered leaving a position. Rather the impetus for leaving correlated to supports they received, or did not receive, to do the hard work. The second interesting correlation among SLI participants was that pressure in larger districts and systems tended to come from the demands of working within these large systems; whereas, smaller and more rural districts had a greater sense of pressure coming from outside the district, such as having no anonymity or being held accountable through regular interactions with stakeholder in all facets of their life.

The findings from the SLI study confirmed work by previous researchers and highlighted additional considerations that adds to our field of knowledge regarding leadership retention. In sum, Tables 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 provide a review of findings to serve as key considerations for future leadership programming and supports. These findings can assist K-12 school districts and university partners to make informed decision to better prepare, grow, and retain novice leaders.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study contributes to the existing research by offering an array of supports to develop and retain novice leaders. Although Chapter Four and summary Tables 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 provide access to those findings in a manner K-12 districts and university partners can readily use to realize improved practices, there are additional nuances and considerations that might better support future implementation. In this section, I present some considerations, unexpected findings, and ideas for future research.

Considerations

In addressing improvements of university preparation programs, there was considerable attention given to a host of discrete skills necessary for an educational leader to be successful.

However, there is not a conceivable path for a licensure program to present and practice so many requested skills at a level that provides principal licensure students with any level of proficiency. Instead, preparation programs need to identify key objectives and outcomes that go a mile deep rather than a mile wide. The skills presented would be foundational and prepare principal licensure students for continued learning via district induction programs and university partnerships geared towards practicing leaders. It is naïve to think that a preparation program will have graduates completely prepared for their future roles. The university preparation program should be seen as the beginning of a process, not its termination. In order to realize such a process, it is necessary for collaborative work to occur between universities and districts to identify the goals, outcomes, and supports for each part of the pre- and post-preparation program experience. A consideration in the creation of such a partnership is the idea that future professional development at the district and university levels need to be planned in a way so that it can occur during the regular work cycle of the leaders involved. Though the idea of ongoing university classes was discussed in a retreat setting might appear desirable, the reality of asking already taxed leaders to attend night classes and complete assignments in addition to their current responsibilities would likely be counterproductive.

There was a sense in both the existing literature and findings from this study of minimal targeted and intentional support of novice educational leaders. Although there are exceptions, many districts appear to provide minimal support to newly hired leaders with the apparent hope that they will figure it out. A significant finding in the SLI research is the desire for meaningful induction programs, mentor relationships, and coaches as resources. Although an SLI participant was not discussing induction programming, they shared an idea in a focus group that could be adapted for use to support a more meaningful induction experience. Some leadership

responsibilities remain constant throughout the year, such as student discipline or coaching teachers, but many responsibilities have a cyclical ebb and flow such as observations, hiring, evaluations, school accountability reports, standardized testing, etc. Rather than being a topic-based experience, an induction program designed alongside this responsibility cycle could lead to significantly deeper learning and sense of support while novice leaders are prepared with additional skills at the point of need to be more effective in these responsibilities.

For many novice leaders, just having an assigned mentor did not appear to provide the hoped-for supports. In considering mentorship supports, it is important that districts move beyond a system where mentors are assigned as part of a box to be checked and instead provide training and expectations for those who will be taking on these important roles. Coupled with a meaningful mentorship program would be providing coaches, as defined in Chapter Four, to novice educational leaders. A significant consideration in providing coaching support is the budget to pay for it. Although coaching can be deemed expensive, research shows an investment in educational leaders has a particularly high return on investment across the organization (Béteille et al., 2011; Cieminski, 2018; Goldring et al., 2007; Marzano et al., 2005; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Mitgang & Gill, 2012; NAESP, 2013; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011; Waters et al., 2004). These coaches can provide support in professional skillsets and accountability in physical, mental, and emotional care. A consideration that surfaced during this study was that every administrator knew the value and importance of self-care strategies. They acknowledged that to most effectively take care of others, as leaders they needed to be in a good place themselves and this required self-care. However, knowing and doing are two different things. Many participants expressed the need for an accountability partner, such as a leadership coach, to assess deficiencies in their self-care, create a plan, and help hold them accountable. Districts

should consider covering all, or most, of the coaching expense because too often educational leaders are not prone to spend money on their own needs, professional development, or supports with so many other priorities clamoring for budget dollars. A district system of providing skilled coaching across the first three years of a novice leader's career could have a significant positive impact on the future effectiveness and retention of those leaders.

One stressor indicated by SLI participants was a disconnect with direct supervisors. This exacerbated another stressor of personal insecurities and often led the leader to feel increased isolation and a lack of communication and feedback. One consideration for improvement would be to have monthly, one-to-one conversations between supervisors and educational leaders. These one-to-one meetings could primarily focus on the supervisor better understanding the needs of the leader and working together to process through situations and concerns as thought partners. Even though every district is structured differently, and for some this might not be practicable, monthly one-to-one meetings should be a priority for at least the district's novice leaders.

An important consideration for better supporting novice leaders involves the study's finding on the importance of teams and colleagues in like-positions. During SLI focus groups, multiple leaders expressed concerns of either not having another administrator in their building or being in a small district without other administrators in like-positions. In these situations, it would be important for districts to either facilitate a means for leaders to find this support in other buildings across the district or in conjunction with other neighboring districts.

As we reflect on the changes needed to improve university principal licensure programs and support and retain novice leaders, we need to be reminded of the effects of principal turnover. Although this was not in the specific findings of the SLI study, a review of literature

indicated principal turnover disproportionately effects systems supporting our most vulnerable students and communities: low-income, minority, and low-achieving student populations (Béteille et al., 2011; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; School Leadership Network, 2019). Low novice leader retention rates within these systems continues a cycle of inequity that further marginalizes underserved populations. Leadership turnover has a direct, negative impact on student achievement, school culture, and teacher retention (Béteille et al., 2011; School Leadership Network, 2019). To improve this inequity, university partners need to address the recruitment and preparation of diverse leadership candidates by identifying and solving barriers to licensure program access. Preparation courses should also have specific curricula designed to build skillsets required for leadership within failing and high poverty systems. Further, K-12 school districts need to address recruitment, hiring, and support systems addressing these same issues. As Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) pointed out, if systemic changes do not occur, we will not realize an equitable educational system that meets the needs of all of our students.

Areas for Future Study

Over the course the SLI study, several recommendations have emerged for future study:

- There continues to be more research on teacher training and retention than the field of school leader retention. This is a course of study that needs continued investigation in order to better meet the needs of our K-12 systems.
- Of the SLI participants, only 11% represented leaders from urban school settings. Further data gathered from urban and inner-city school leaders are crucial to understanding the commonalties and discrepancies between rural and suburban school settings compared to the systems serving so many marginalized populations.

- Multiple studies have documented the growing complexity of school leadership. Is this complexity making the position of a single administrator, or one trained across so many different responsibilities, an outdated system needing to be addressed? What is a reasonable workload, and how many staff does it take to accomplish the work? Should there be consideration of specialization by splitting leadership responsibilities in buildings to different roles with unique skillsets, training, and focus?
- This study identified a retreat setting as a meaningful support for novice leaders. What are the components that make a retreat environment most effective? What topics and focus are most effectively addressed through a retreat?
- The finding in the SLI study that retreats are a valuable support for novice leaders was identified by participants in a convenience sample at a retreat. Is this a biased sample set? A future study with participants not involved in a retreat could look to corroborate or call into question this particular finding.
- In order to know how to best support novice leaders through the stressors identified in this study, research could be conducted on key components to work through and manage each stressor.
- With the finding that mentoring programs and coaching resources are valuable post-hire supports, what training and skills do a good mentor and coach need to effectively support novice leaders?
- The SLI study was conducted before the present pandemic. It is anticipated we would see even more acute stressors and burnout in educational environments as this traumatic event laid bare and exacerbated many of the concerns highlighted in the

study. A future SLI study could explore the leadership experiences of post-COVID recovery.

- Riley's study (2018) provided a much-needed window into the pressures and demands of educational leaders. A similar longitudinal study, focused on educational leaders in the United States, would provide meaningful findings to better meet the needs within that educational system.

Conclusion

As a former principal and currently practicing K-12 district superintendent, this research has personally been very impactful. As I listened to the various groups discuss the challenges of such dynamic and important responsibilities, I had a great sense of empathy and concern for the things being described. I wanted to reach out and tell them it was going to be okay, and they were doing important work. I wanted to offer supports and find ways to help. I believe these feelings were enhanced for a variety of reasons. First, I was astounded by the research I encountered while conducting the literature review. Riley's work (2018) was particularly poignant and indicative of the significant impacts such leadership has on those who stand up and willingly take on such a heavy mantle of responsibility. Second, it brought back a great deal of the experiences I and my colleagues have experienced as we have attempted to serve our communities over the years. As my wife read parts of this dissertation while it was being written, she commented, "It sounds so much like what you've been describing for years." As a researcher, I needed to regularly regroup myself because I too heard my own experience being shared through the voices of SLI participants, and I did not want my experience to be a part of their narrative and shared experience. It took considerable reflection to regularly check my work and do my best to remove myself from the story and findings because so much of what was

discussed resonated so deeply. Third, in my role as a superintendent, I have always seen one of my greatest responsibilities being the hiring, development, and support of building and district leaders. Professionally, this research has created a great deal of introspection on what efforts I have made that have been successful, and how much further we need to go to better meet the needs of our educational leaders, both in my district and systems across our nation.

In the course of this research, I have begun to make changes in the system I currently serve. We have begun to identify areas of support either not available or not robust enough to meet the needs of our building and district-level leaders, and particularly, our novice leaders. This year, we have begun a cohort to encourage and support staff interested in pursuing leadership opportunities as well as a cohort to support our newest leaders. However, the findings from the SLI study and our initial efforts in our district this year identifies we still have significant progress to make.

Our district implements a strategic planning process including the creation of a multi-year vision plan focused on five key areas: learning, teaching, leadership, professional development, and the wider community. Specific deliverable outcomes are created at the building and district levels focused on vision statements created in the plan. Over the course of the year, each department and building work with their leadership teams to achieve the deliverable outcomes they created for their systems. At the end of each school year, we convene to account for our agreed upon outcomes and then create new sets of deliverables for the coming year. This year, we happened to be conducting a major “refresh” of our five-year vision plan. From the beginning of this strategic planning process, we identified leadership as a core component of our overall strategy. With the completion of this study, we have a much more defined understanding of what components can best serve the support, development, and retention of our leaders. We will be

incorporating these findings into our planning to serve as a major factor in the development of both vision statements and deliverable outcomes. This will be our work for the next five years in the areas of leadership. I look forward to the opportunity to put into practice the findings from the SLI study.

I recognize our district does not have all of the answers, but I hope the practices we put into place can be a model to share with other districts seeking to better support their leaders through intentional focus and strategic planning. While I have begun sharing some initial understandings and practices with both regional superintendents and practitioners at state conferences, I trust there will be greater opportunities at the state and national level to share the complete findings through the completion of this study. I value collaborative work and will be seeking opportunities to partner with like-minded districts, university preparation programs, and educational and civic organizations to improve the development and retention of leaders, particularly novice leaders.

Though difficult, the role of K-12 educational leaders is filled with rewards that are meaningful and lasting. There are many days one can say they could not ever pay someone enough to take on such a difficult job; however, there are many days where it is hard to believe you get paid to serve others in such an impactful way. There is cause for concern regarding novice leadership turnover and retention, but there is also hope. With thoughtful and intentional planning, focus, and supports, there is a way to avoid “the looming crisis” (Robinson, 2018, p. 1).

Impact: David

Novice leadership turnover has a significant, negative impact on both the leaders involved and the systems they are seeking to serve. We can do better. It is imperative that we do.

Using the findings of this study to act, university preparation programs and K-12 school districts can design systems that prepare and support novice leaders in achieving success and best serving stakeholders.

David was hired as the principal of a struggling high school. The school had not seen effective leadership for almost two decades. Before he could even begin improving the academic situation, now deeply-engrained cultural issues needed to be addressed. David was hired to improve the climate and culture of the building. He was the perfect match. His social and emotional intelligence was unparalleled, and he had the uncanny ability to make a friend of everyone. David had compassion and empathy for students and parents and though staff members might not have agreed with him all the time regarding decisions, no one could doubt he cared for them. Within a relatively short timeframe, the experience for students and staff was completely different. With culture and climate addressed, it was time to begin the heavy lift of improving instruction and learning. This was not David's strongest skillset and significant questions were raised about his ability to continue in the job. The school board, superintendent, and other district leaders questioned if he was still the right person for the job or would the district need to look elsewhere.

The new superintendent knew that David was willing to learn. He just needed the supports. His resilience, along with his passion for what he was doing, proved invaluable as he was provided resources to support his in new phase of critical work: (a) a set of initial meetings between the two leaders outlined a new building focus and set expectations and desired outcomes; (b) internal personnel shifts provided a more rounded team to bolster his skillset; (c) he enrolled in a four-week, on-line university seminar focused on change management; (d) regular meetings were set with the superintendent to foster understanding, assess progress,

update plans, and refine supports; and (e) he was provided a coach as a resource. The coach worked with him on three targeted areas of need. To date, the building continues to move forward in ways not imagined years before. The building was not jolted by yet another leadership change. David continues to acquire and enhance skills and is an exemplar of how supporting principals can help retain such a valuable asset: our leaders.

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APPENDIX A: COLORADO PRINCIPAL QUALITY STANDARDS

A Common Vision of Great School Leadership

The Colorado Principal Quality Standards


Great principals take responsibility for the success of every student in their school. While classroom teachers are vital to the success of every child they teach, it is the principal who is responsible for providing high-quality education to all students in the school.

School leadership is a demanding role requiring principals and assistant principals to demonstrate numerous essential skills. Successful principals seek to consistently develop and improve in their role, just as they ask of their teachers and students.

Identifying the complex components of high-quality school leadership is a fundamental step in supporting principals' professional growth as well as developing a fair and reliable evaluation process (both aspects of the Great Teachers and Leaders Act). The statewide Principal Quality Standards provide this shared understanding of the essentials of great school leadership—a common vision.

Just as the Teacher Quality Standards outline the knowledge and skills required of an excellent teacher, the Principal Quality Standards outline the knowledge and skills required of an excellent principal. They are the core of the principal evaluation process and offer a tool for principal self-reflection, goal setting and ongoing professional growth.

The Principal Quality Standards are foundational to providing every student with what they deserve—excellent school leaders who are consistently supported in their efforts to improve in their profession, support their teachers' professional growth and influence student learning in new and powerful ways.



Effective principals are responsible for the collective success of their schools, including the learning, growth, and achievement of both students and staff.



COLORADO
Department of Education

**For more information contact
CDE Educator Effectiveness**

Educator_Effectiveness@cde.state.co.us
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness>

QUALITY STANDARD I

Principals demonstrate organizational leadership by strategically developing a vision and mission, leading change, enhancing the capacity of personnel, distributing resources, and aligning systems of communication for continuous school improvement.

ELEMENT A: Principals collaboratively develop the vision, mission, and strategic plan, based on a cycle of continuous improvement of student outcomes, and facilitate their integration into the school community.

ELEMENT B: Principals collaborate with staff and stakeholders to implement strategies for change to improve student outcomes.

ELEMENT C: Principals establish and effectively manage systems that ensure high-quality staff.

ELEMENT D: Principals establish systems and partnerships for managing all available school resources to facilitate improved student outcomes.

ELEMENT E: Principals facilitate the design and use of a variety of communication strategies with all stakeholders.

QUALITY STANDARD II

Principals demonstrate inclusive leadership practices that foster a positive school culture and promote safety and equity for all students, staff, and community.

ELEMENT A: Principals create a professional school environment and foster relationships that promote staff and student success and well-being.

ELEMENT B: Principals ensure that the school provides an orderly and supportive environment that fosters a sense of safety and well-being.

ELEMENT C: Principals commit to an inclusive and positive school environment that meets the needs of all students and

promotes the preparation of students to live productively and contribute to the diverse cultural contexts of a global society.

ELEMENT D: Principals create and utilize systems to share leadership and support collaborative efforts throughout the school.

ELEMENT E: Principals design and/or utilize structures and processes which result in family and community engagement and support.

QUALITY STANDARD III

Principals demonstrate instructional leadership by aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment, supporting professional learning, conducting observations, providing actionable feedback, and holding staff accountable for student outcomes.

ELEMENT A: Principals establish, align, and ensure implementation of a district/BOCES plan of instruction, instructional practice, assessments, and use of student data that result in academic growth and achievement for all students.

ELEMENT B: Principals foster a collaborative culture of job-embedded professional learning.

ELEMENT C: Principals demonstrate knowledge of effective instructional practice and provide feedback to promote continuous improvement of teaching and learning.

ELEMENT D: Principals hold all staff accountable for setting and achieving measureable student outcomes.

QUALITY STANDARD IV

Principals demonstrate professionalism through ethical conduct, reflection, and external leadership.

ELEMENT A: Principals demonstrate high standards for professional conduct.

ELEMENT B: Principals link professional growth to their professional goals.

ELEMENT C: Principals build and sustain productive partnerships with key community stakeholders, including public and private sectors, to promote school improvement, student learning, and student well-being.

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY Center for Educator Preparation

Research Study: School Leadership Institute

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM: Adult Participation in a focus Group

What is the Purpose of this Research?

You have been asked to take part in a research study that intends to identify structures and practices to support school leaders who are recent CSU graduates in the first three years on the job.

Why have I been asked to take part?

You are part of the CSU Leadership Institute and a recent graduate of CSU's principal licensure program. We would like you to take part in a discussion to help describe your perspective of leadership support needs.

What will I be Asked to Do?

You are being invited to participate in three focus group discussions to take place at Estes Park of the Rockies during the School Leadership Institute. Specifically, we want you to help identify practices and support structures needed for new school leaders. Outcomes from this discussion will help guide curriculum reform and development at CSU to better prepare school principals. There will be 2-4 participants in the group discussion, and you do not need to answer any question that you would prefer not to answer. With your permission, your comments will be audiotaped. Only the research team will have access to the audiotapes, and no identifiers will be on the recording. Once the recording has been transcribed, it will be destroyed. The group will be discussing identification of supports needed in their current role and how to improve preparation program at CSU. Your time commitment is no more than about 1 to 1.5 hours.

Voluntary Participation

This discussion is *voluntary*—you do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do not take part, it will have no effect on your current status. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. You may leave the group at any time for any reason. There are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions. We want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group. In respect for each

other, we ask that only one individual speak at a time in the group and that responses made by all participants be kept confidential.

Risks

We do not think any risks are involved in taking part in this study.

This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Benefits

There are no benefits for taking part in this research. We hope to learn more about clinical partnerships and practice.

Who Will see my Information?

Your privacy will be protected. Your name will not be used in any report that is published. The discussion will be kept *strictly confidential*. While your responses are confidentially held by the researchers, please keep in mind there will be other focus group participants present during any comments you make who may or may not share information outside of the focus group, including information that you may feel is sensitive or private. We may be asked to share the research files with the CSU Institutional Review Board for auditing purposes.

What if I have Questions?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Donna Cooner, Ph.D., at 970/491-5536. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491- 1553.

Audiotape Permission

I have been told that the discussion will be audio recorded.

I have been told that I can state that I don't want the discussion to be taped and it will not be. I can ask that the tape be turned off at any time.

I agree to be audio taped ___ Yes ___ No

Please write your name below and check yes or no. If you want to take part.

Sign your name at the bottom.

NAME

_____ Yes, I would like to take part in the focus group.

_____ No, I would not like to participate in the focus group.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Do you give permission for the researchers to contact you again in the future to follow-up on this study or to participate in new research projects? Please initial next to your choice below. YES NO

APPENDIX C: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

PROTOCOL
Social, Behavioral &
Education Research
Colorado State University

Protocol # 17-7553H
Date Printed: 03/08/2018

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PROTOCOL Protocol # 17-7553H

Social, Behavioral &

Date Printed: 03/08/2018

Education Research

Colorado State

University

Protocol Title: Colorado State University School Leadership Institute

Protocol Type: Social, Behavioral & Education Research

Date Submitted: 09/13/2017

Approval Period: 10/19/2017-10/04/2018

Important Note: This Print View may not reflect all comments and contingencies for approval. Please check the comments section of the online protocol.

Questions that appear to not have been answered may not have been required for this submission.

Please see the system application for more details.

*** * * Personnel Information * * ***

IMPORTANT NOTE: Mandatory Personnel on a protocol are: Principal Investigator and Department Head. Only the Principal Investigator can submit the protocol; although other personnel listed on the protocol can create the protocol. Human Subjects Protection Training is mandatory for Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigator, and Key Personnel (as defined by NIH). Training must be updated every three (3) years.

Principal Investigator Mandatory

Name of Principal Investigator (Faculty, Staff or Postdoc)	Degree	Title
Cooner, Donna	EdD	Professor
Email	Phone	Fax
Donna.Cooner@ColoState.EDU	(970) 491-5536	
Department Name	Campus Delivery Code	
School of Education	1588	

Human Subjects Training Completed? PIs must complete Training every Y three (3) years

Department Head Mandatory

Name of Department Head	Degree	Title
Gloeckner, Gene		Professor
Email	Phone	Fax

Gene.Gloeckner@ColoState.EDU (970) 491-7661

Department Name Campus Delivery Code
244

Human Subjects Training Completed?? Training is not required for Y Department Heads. Select "No" if you do not know if your Department Head has completed training or not.

Other Researcher or Key Personnel

Name of Other Research Personnel	Degree	Title
Fothergill, Wendy	phD	Assistant Professor
Email	Phone	Fax
Wendy.Fothergill@colostate.edu	(970) 491-5292	
Department Name	Campus Delivery Code (CSU) or Off-campus Mailing Address	
School of Education	1588	
Human Subjects Training Completed? Training is required for all Key Personnel on NIH grants.		

Name of Other Research Personnel	Degree	Title
Searle, Juliana		Instructor
Email	Phone	Fax
Juliana.Searle@colostate.edu	(970) 491-5292	
Department Name	Campus Delivery Code (CSU) or Off-campus Mailing Address	
School of Education	1588	
Human Subjects Training Completed? Training is required for all Key Personnel on NIH grants.		N

* * * Subject Population * * *

Subject Population(s) Checklist

Select All That Apply:

- X Adult Volunteers
- Elderly
 - Employees
 - Mentally Disabled or Decisionally Challenged
 - Minors (under 18)
 - Pregnant Women
 - Prisoners
 - Soldiers
 - Students

Other (i.e., non-English speaking or any population that is not specified above)

*** * * Study Location * * ***

Study Location(s) Checklist

Select All That Apply - Note: Check "Other" and input text: 1. If your location is not listed, or 2) If you would like to list details of your already-checked location (e.g., specific school within a school district) Aims Community College

Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

Colorado State University

Colorado State University - Pueblo Campus

Denver Public Schools

Poudre School District

Poudre Valley Health System (PVHS)

Rocky Mountain National Park

Thompson School District

University of Colorado - Boulder

University of Colorado - Colorado Springs

University of Colorado - Denver

University of Colorado Health Sciences Center

University of Northern Colorado

- X Other (In the box below, list your study location if not checked above. You may also list details of your already-checked location (e.g., specific school within a school district))

We will be conducting this research in Colorado retreat locations when we will convene for a meeting. Participants are from all across the United States and are alumni from CSU's principal preparation program.

*** * * General Checklist * ***

*** General Checklist**

Select All That Apply :

Cooperating/Collaborating

Institution(s) -Institution where
recruitment will occur OR Institution
where Collaborating PI will conduct
associated research.

Federally Sponsored Project

Training Grant

Project is associated with the Colorado School of Public Health

Program Project Grant

Subjects will be compensated for participation

- Behavioral observation
- Deception
- Human blood, cells, tissues, or body fluids. If checked, is IBC approval needed?
- List PARF approval date and number.
- X Interview
 - Study of existing data
 - Survey/questionnaire
 - Thesis or Dissertation Project (Attach Methodology chapter in the Attachment section) Waiver of consent
 - Other (clarify in text box to the right)

*** * * Funding * * ***

Funding Checklist

NONE

NOTE: If applicable, Grant Application must be attached in the Attachment Section (#11).

Funding - Grants/Contracts

Funding - Fellowships

Funding - Other

Gift Funding

Dept. Funding

Department Name

School of Education

Other Funding

Other Fund Name

American Association for College Teachers
of Education

*** * * Expedited Paragraphs * * ***

PLEASE READ: The criteria for expedited review are listed below. Please review these criteria to evaluate if your protocol meets the expedited-review criteria. For expedited review, a protocol must be no more than minimal risk (i.e., "not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life") AND must only involve human subjects in one or more of the following numbered paragraphs. If none of the expedited criteria are appropriate for your project, please move to the next screen without selecting any of these criteria; your protocol will be reviewed by the full IRB. Note: The IRB will make the final determination if your protocol is eligible for expedited review.

Expedite Criteria:

1. Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met.
 - a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review.)
 - b) Research on medical devices for which
 - i) An investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or
 - ii) The medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.
2. Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows:
 - a) From healthy, nonpregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8-week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; or
 - b) From other adults and children, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8-week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.
3. Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means.

4. Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications.)

Examples:

- a) Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy;
 - b) Weighing or testing sensory acuity;
 - c) Magnetic resonance imaging;
 - d) Electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography;
 - e) Moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.
5. Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis). (NOTE: Some research in this paragraph may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)
- X 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- X 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior(including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

* * * Purpose, Study Procedures, Background * * *

Original Protocol Number (e.g., 07-226H)

Title (Please indicate if the protocol title is different from the proposal title)

Colorado State University School Leadership Institute

Complete Sections 1 - 11. Specify N/A as appropriate. Do not leave any sections blank.

1. Purpose of the study

- a) Provide a brief lay summary of the project in < 200 words. The lay summary should be readily understandable to the general public.

CSU's principal licensure program places many of the school leaders in our partner school districts, yet many graduates have requested support during the critical first years. This Institute, meeting in retreat settings within Colorado, will provide for that need and improve the experience of CSU School of Education graduates. The researchers want to know how the participants identify structures and practices to support school leaders, and recent CSU graduates, in the first three years on the job. Focus groups will be conducted during the retreats to provide descriptive feedback to the researchers. Participants will be recruited from alumni of CSU's principal preparation who are attending these retreat for school leaders.

- b) What does the Investigator(s) hope to learn from the study?

Project Goals: 1) To identify structures and practices to support school leaders, and recent CSU graduates, in the first three years on the job.
2) To provide critical networking opportunities with other new administrators, and recent CSU graduates, across the country with a focus on renewal and retention.

2. Study Procedures

- a) Describe all study procedures here (please do not respond "See Attachment Section"). The box below is for text only. If you would like to add tables, charts, etc., attach those files in the Attachment section (#11).

Researchers will conduct 3-4 focus group sessions with each group divided into smaller groups of 2-4 participants in each, lasting for roughly 1 hour. Focus group questions will ask participants to identify supports needed in their current role and how to improve preparation program at CSU. All participants will be asked the same questions: Researchers will record the conversations, send the audio in to be transcribed, and then researchers will code data to reveal cross-cutting themes.

The CSU School Leadership Institute will launch in fall, 2017. The institute will consist of two retreats (one in spring/ one in fall) for CSU principal graduates who are currently in their first few years in school leadership in Colorado schools. Participants in the research study will be recruited from retreat participants. The retreat based setting is critical to allow participants to concentrate of the goals of the project rather than the daily stressful demands of school leadership. We will intentionally recruit practicing leaders from our partner schools to further support the Professional Development School model. (Alignment to SOE). Retreats will include such topics as vision setting, identifying and understanding personal leadership styles, shared leadership, organizational politics, and other highly relevant topics. After IRB approval is secured, participant focus groups will be conducted using a protocol developed from a literature analysis of current school leadership research based best practices for support and retention. Focus group recordings will be transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes to identify structures and practices for supporting new school leaders (GOAL 1). These results will form the baseline for future research on interventions to support new school leaders.

- b) State if audio or video taping will occur. Describe how the tapes will be maintained during and upon completion of the project. Describe what will become of the tapes after use (e.g., shown at scientific meetings, erased, etc.).

Audio taping will occur. Digital files will be kept on a secure server for no less than 3 years.

- c) State if deception will be used. If so, provide a rationale and describe debriefing procedures. Submit a debriefing script in the Attachment section (#11).

No deception will occur.

3. Background/Rationale

- a) Briefly describe past findings leading to the formulation of the study, if applicable.

The pressure is on leaders to perform at a high level in schools from their first day on the job, yet support for newly practicing school leaders is often nonexistent. If principals do not perceive a connection between newly learned information and problems they encounter in the workplace, they are less likely to retrieve and apply that knowledge spontaneously. The new leader's ability to exercise effective leadership is related to the purposeful quality of thought that guides administrative action. Emerging research on instructional leadership must address the thinking that underlies the exercise of leadership, not simply describe discrete behaviors of effective leaders. School leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning, according to research. Moreover, school leaders strongly shape the conditions for high-quality teaching and are the prime factor in determining whether teachers stay in high-needs schools. High-quality leaders, therefore, are vital to the effectiveness of our nation's public schools, especially those serving the children with the fewest advantages in life.

* * * Subject Population * * *

4. Subject Population - In the space below, please describe the participants that you are requesting to recruit (include requested participant number and description of each group requested).

- a) Requested Participant Description (Include number that you plan to study and description of each group requested, if applicable).

Roughly 8-10 participants from CSU graduates of principal preparation program who are in the first three years of school leadership position

- b) What is the rationale for studying the requested group(s) of participants?

Rationale: The pressure is on leaders to perform at a high level in schools from their first day on the job, yet support for newly practicing school leaders is often

nonexistent. If principals do not perceive a connection between newly learned information and problems they encounter in the workplace, they are less likely to retrieve and apply that knowledge spontaneously. The new leader's ability to exercise effective leadership is related to the purposeful quality of thought that guides administrative action. Emerging research on instructional leadership must address the thinking that underlies the exercise of leadership, not simply describe discrete behaviors of effective leaders. School leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning, according to research. Moreover, school leaders strongly shape the conditions for high-quality teaching and are the prime factor in determining whether teachers stay in high-needs schools. High-quality leaders, therefore, are vital to the effectiveness of our nation's public schools, especially those serving the children with the fewest advantages in life. CSU's principal licensure program places many of the school leaders in our partner school districts, yet many graduates have requested support during the critical first years. This Institute will provide for that need and improve the experience of CSU School of Education graduates

- c) If applicable, state the rationale for involvement of potentially vulnerable subjects to be entered into the study, including minors, pregnant women, economically and educationally disadvantaged, and decisionally impaired people. Specify the measures being taken to minimize the risks and the chance of harm to the potentially vulnerable subjects.

N/A

- d) If women, minorities, or minors are not included, a clear compelling rationale must be provided. Examples for not including minors: participant must be a registered voter; the drug or device being studied would interfere with normal growth and development; etc.

N/A

- e) State if any of the subjects are students, employees, or laboratory personnel. They should be presented with the same written informed consent. If compensation is allowed, they should also receive it.

N/A

- f) Describe how potential subjects will be identified for recruitment. Examples include: class rosters, group membership, individuals answering an advertisement, organization position titles (i.e., Presidents, web designers, etc.). How will potential participants learn about the research and how will they be recruited (e.g., flyer, email, web posting, telephone, etc.)? Attach recruitment materials in the Attachment section (#11). Important to remember: subjects cannot be contacted before IRB approval.

CSU graduates of principal preparation program who are in the first three years of school leadership position and who will be attending School Leadership Institute retreats. Participants will be recruiting once they are at the retreat.

*** * * Subject Population * * ***

4. Subject Population (continued)

- g) Identify the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Only members of the School Leadership Institute

- h) Compensation. Explain the amount and schedule of compensation, if any, that will be paid for participation in the study. Include provisions for prorating payment.

N/A

- i) Estimate the probable duration of the entire study. This estimate should include the total time each subject is to be involved and the duration the data about the subject is to be collected (e.g., This is a 2-year study. Participants will be interviewed 3 times per year; each interview will last approximately

2 hours. Total approximate time commitment for participants is 12 hours.) The focus group will likely last for one hour to one hour and thirty minutes.

*** * * Risks * * ***

5. Risks (Input N/A if not applicable)

US Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) Regulations define a subject at risk as follows: "...any individual who may be exposed to the possibility of injury, including physical, psychological, or social injury, as a consequence of participation as a subject in any research, development, or related activity which departs from the application of those accepted methods necessary to meet his needs, or which increases the ordinary risks of daily life, including the recognized risks inherent in a chosen occupation or field of service."

- a) For the following categories, include an estimate of the potential risk. Input N/A if not applicable.

Physical well-being.

N/A

Psychological well-being.

N/A

Political well-being.

N/A

Economic well-being.

N/A

Social well-being.

N/A

- b) In case of overseas research, describe qualifications/preparations that enable you to evaluate cultural appropriateness and estimate/minimize risks to subjects.

N/A

- c) Discuss plans for ensuring necessary medical or professional intervention in the event of a distressed subject.

Subject will be assisted by emergency professionals.

- d) If audio/video taping will be used, state if it could increase potential risk to subject's confidentiality.

Only researchers will have access to audio recordings. If a participants opts out of recording, researchers will conduct an interview with a written transcription. All transcribed data will be kept password protected and in a locked location.

***** Benefits, Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality *****

6. Benefits

- a) Describe the potential benefit(s) to be gained by the subjects or how the results of the study may benefit future subjects. Indicate if there is no direct benefit to the participants.

Subjects will be able to reflect on their experiences and may gain insight.

7. Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality

- a) Describe the procedures in place that will protect the privacy of the subjects and maintain the confidentiality of the data. If a linked list is used, explain when the linked list will be destroyed. Provide a sample of the code that will be used, if applicable.

Names will be kept confidential.

- b) If information derived from the study will be provided to the subject's personal physician, a government agency, or any other person or group, describe to whom the information will be given and the nature of the information.

N/A

- c) Specify where and under what conditions study data will be kept, how samples will be labeled, who has access to the data, and what will be available and to whom. Federal Regulations require that study data and consent documents be kept for a minimum of three (3) years after the completion of the study by the PI. For longitudinal projects, the PI may be required to keep the data and documents for a longer time period.

Data will be kept by researchers in a personal office in a secure location and digital information will be stored in a secure fashion. Only researchers will have access to information. should indicate that the audio transcriber/s will have access to the data, and what precautions will be taken to secure confidentiality from them as a result.

*** * * Potential Conflict of Interest * * ***

8. Potential Conflict of Interest

Although you have already submitted CSU's official Conflict of Interest form (COI/COC) to the University, it is the IRB's responsibility to ensure that conflicting interests related to submitted protocols do not adversely affect the protection of participants or the credibility of the human research protection program at CSU.

Please answer questions a-d below. Please note that if you indicate that you have a potential conflict of interest in relation to this protocol, your CSU COI/COC Reporting Form must reflect this potential conflict. Link to CSU's Conflict of Interest policy: <http://www.provost.colostate.edu/print/coirev.pdf>.

- a) N In connection with this protocol, do you or any of the protocol investigators or their immediate family members (i.e., spouse and legal dependents, as determined by the IRS) have a potential conflict of interest?
- b) N/A If you do have a potential conflict of interest, is this reported in your current COI/COC?
- c) N/A If you do have a potential conflict of interest, is there a management plan in place to manage this potential conflict?
- d) N/A If you do have a potential conflict of interest, is this potential conflict of interest included in your consent document (as required in the Management Plan)?

If you have reported a possible conflict of interest, the IRB will forward the title of this protocol to your Research Associate Dean to complete your COI file.

For more information on CSU's policy on Conflict of Interest, please see the Colorado State University Academic Faculty and Administrative Professional Manual Sections D.7.6 & D.7.7:

<http://www.facultycouncil.colostate.edu/files/manual/sectiond.htm#D.7.6>.

Link to CSU's Conflict of Interest policy:
<http://www.provost.colostate.edu/print/coirev.pdf>.

*** * * Informed Consent * * ***

9. Informed Consent See sample consent forms at
<http://web.research.colostate.edu/ricro/hrc/forms.aspx>

NOTE: In order to complete this protocol, you must upload either a Consent Form or an Alteration of Consent Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script) OR (if neither of those apply to your project) you must complete the Waiver of consent information.

In the space below, provide consent process background information, for each Consent Form, Alteration of Consent Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script), or Waiver of consent. You will not be able to submit this protocol without completing this information.

Informed Consent

Title	Focus.group.consent.final.w.date.stamp
Consent Information Type	Consent
Consent Form Template	X Attachment Focus Group Consent Form.final.w.date.stamp.

Who is obtaining consent? The person obtaining consent must be knowledgeable about the study and authorized by the PI to consent human subjects.

How is consent being obtained?

What steps are you taking to determine that potential subjects are competent to participate in the decisionmaking process?

*** * * Assent Background * * ***

10. Assent Background

All minors must provide an affirmative consent to participate by signing a simplified assent form, unless the Investigator(s) provides evidence to the IRB that the minor subjects are not capable of assenting because of age, maturity, psychological state, or other factors.

See sample assent/consent forms at
<http://web.research.colostate.edu/ricro/hrc/forms.aspx>

If applicable, provide assent process background information for each Assent Form, Alteration of Assent Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script), or Waiver.

Assent Background

*** * * Attachments * * ***

11. Attachments

Attach relevant documents here. These could include: Collaborating Investigator's IRB approval and approved documents; Conflict of Interest information; Debriefing Script; Grant/Sub-contract; HIPAA Authorization or Waiver Form from HIPAA-covered entity; Interview/Focus Group Questions; Investigator's Brochure; Letters of Agreement/Cooperation from organizations who will help with recruitment; Methodology section of associated Thesis or Dissertation project; Questionnaires; Radiation Control Office approval material; Recruitment Material (e.g., flyers, email text, verbal scripts); Sponsor's Protocol; Surveys; Other files associated with protocol (can upload most standard file formats: xls, pdf, jpg, tif, etc.) Please be sure to attach all documents associated with your protocol. Failure to attach the files associated with the protocol may result in this protocol being returned to you for completion prior to being reviewed. Students: Be sure to attach the Methods Section of your thesis or dissertation proposal. All PIs: If this protocol is associated with a grant proposal, please remember to attach your grant.

To update or revise any attachments, please delete the existing attachment and upload the revised document to replace it.

Document Type
Attachment
Document Name

Interview/Focus Group Questions
Focus Group Questions
Focus Group Questions

Document Type
Attachment
Document Name

Recruitment Material (e.g., flyers, email text, verbal scripts)
Cooner.recruitment
Cooner.recruitment

*** * * Obligations * * ***

Obligations (Researcher's Responsibilities)

The Principal Investigator is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the project. Obligations of the Principal Investigator are:

Conduct the research involving human subjects as presented in the protocol, including modifications, as approved by the Department and Institutional Review Board. Changes in any aspect of the study (for example project design, procedures, consent forms, advertising

materials, additional key personnel or subject population) will be submitted to the IRB for approval before instituting the changes (PI will submit the "Amendment/Revision" form);

Provide all subjects a copy of the signed consent form, if applicable. Investigators are required to retain signed consent documents for three (3) years after close of the study;

Maintain an approved status for Human Subjects Protection training. Training must be updated every three (3) years (Contact RICRO to check your current approval/renewal dates). For more information: Human Subjects Training Completed?

Submit either the "Protocol Deviation Form" or the "Report Form" to report protocol Deviations/Violations, Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events that occur in the course of the protocol. Any of these events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible, but not later than five (5) working days;

Submit the "Continuing Review" Form in order to maintain active status of the approved protocol. The form must be submitted annually at least four (4) weeks prior to expiration, five (5) weeks for protocols that require full review. If the protocol is not renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been rereviewed;

Notify the IRB that the study is complete by submitting the "Final Report" form.

X The Principal Investigator has read and agrees to abide by the above obligations.

*** * * Event History * * ***

Event History

Date	Status	View Attachments	Letters
09/13/2017	NEW FORM PROTOCOL CLONED (16-6636H)		
09/13/2017	NEW FORM SUBMITTED	Y	
09/19/2017	NEW FORM RETURNED		
09/20/2017	NEW FORM RESUBMITTED	Y	
09/27/2017	NEW FORM PANEL ASSIGNED		
09/27/2017	NEW FORM REVIEWER(S) ASSIGNED		
10/26/2017	NEW FORM APPROVED	Y	Y