

DISSERTATION

AN INQUIRY INTO THE INFLUENCE OF STRESS ON NEW SCHOOL LEADERS

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## ABSTRACT

### AN INQUIRY INTO THE INFLUENCE OF STRESS ON NEW SCHOOL LEADERS

This study aimed to understand the sources of stress new school leaders identify and how that stress influences them and what coping strategies or stress management techniques school leaders employ to stay healthy within this profession. Semi-structured focus groups were utilized to elicit thick, rich descriptions of participants' experiences. Extensive data sets were collected over several years from 17 focus group interviews. Narrative analysis of participants' responses provided findings on the stress they experienced, including lack of preparation for the role, pressure to perform, isolation, unattainable work-life balance, time constraints, and compassion fatigue. They also indicated that chronic workplace stress was impacting their health and wellbeing. As the participants developed as leaders, they were able to minimize many of the stressors they still encountered by enlisting a wide variety of stress management techniques, including cognitive appraisal, self-reflection, prioritizing goals, setting healthy boundaries, establishing strong support systems, and reconnecting with their purpose.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*“The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking. Don’t settle. As with all matters of heart, you’ll know when you find it.”*

*Steve Jobs*

I feel grateful for this entire experience. Working as an administrator, teaching at the university in the evenings, and raising children while earning my Ph.D. has certainly stretched me to my capacity. In the end, I have grown as a scholar and as a human. I have certainly found what I love to do. In recognition and appreciation, thank you:

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my sister, Terri, for her unending love, support, and encouragement throughout this doctoral journey. Thank you for being my rock! To my children, Eli and Finn, thank you for your patience and understanding. I've been in school half of your lifetime. I know this has been a sacrifice for the entire family. To my husband, Michael, thank you for picking up the slack. To my mom, R.I.P., I know she would have been so proud of me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
DEFINITION OF TERMS .....	vii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Stress and New School Leaders.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
The Purpose of the Study.....	3
Qualitative Research Design.....	4
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Narrative Analysis .....	7
The Significance of this Study.....	7
Gaps in the Literature.....	9
The Limitations of this Study .....	10
Organization of this Study .....	12
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
Research on Stress and School Administrators .....	13
Contextual Framework.....	13
Stress and Health.....	14
Chronic Workplace Stress.....	15
Pressure to Perform.....	17
Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Traumatic Stress .....	18
Work-Life Balance.....	21
Isolation.....	23
Research on Stress Management Techniques and Coping Strategies.....	26
Problem-focused, Appraisal-focused, and Emotional-focused Coping Strategies .....	27
Self-care .....	28
Resiliency.....	29
Social Support.....	30
Reflection.....	31
Mentorships.....	32
Knowledge Gaps and Constraints.....	34
Implications.....	35
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD OF INQUIRY .....	37
Introduction.....	37
Background, Setting, and Positionality.....	37
Research Design.....	39
Participants.....	40
Leah.....	41
Lily.....	41
Jasmine.....	41
Andrea.....	42

Tyler.....	42
David.....	42
Ryan.....	42
Carter.....	42
Kyle.....	43
Method of Data Collection.....	43
Data Analysis.....	47
Kyle’s I Poem (partial sample).....	49
Trustworthiness.....	51
Ethical Considerations.....	51
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	53
Category 1: Baptism of Fire.....	56
Category 2: Under Pressure.....	61
Category 3: One is the Loneliest Number.....	69
Category 4: Walk the Line.....	72
Category Five: Everybody Hurts.....	75
Category Six: Stand by Me.....	78
Category Seven: I Will Survive.....	83
Conclusion.....	90
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	92
Introduction.....	92
Interpretation of the Findings.....	93
The Struggle is Real.....	93
Becoming Resilient Leaders.....	95
Implications for Practice.....	98
Transforming Theory into Practical Application.....	101
Recommendations for School Districts’ Administrator Induction Programs.....	101
Recommendations for University Preparation Programs.....	102
Limitations To These Solutions.....	103
Mentorships, Critical Reflection Theory, and Social Support Theory.....	103
Equity and Inclusion Considerations.....	105
Recommendations for Future Research.....	107
Conclusion.....	108
REFERENCES.....	110
APPENDIX A: IRB PROTOCOL.....	121
APPENDIX B: IRB FORM #19-9521H.....	134
APPENDIX C: NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH.....	157
APPENDIX D: CERT OF COMPLETION HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPATION.....	158
APPENDIX E: RESEARCHER NOTE.....	159
APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM.....	160

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

<b>Row</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Stress	a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances
Stressors	something that causes a state of strain or tension
chronic workplace stress	high intensity stress in the workplace that lasts for an extended period of time without any reprieve or resolution
compassion fatigue	when a culmination of constant and intense contact with students goes from compassion to fatigue from stress to complete exhaustion
secondary traumatic stress	a natural but disruptive by-product of working with traumatized students (often used synonymously with compassion fatigue)
work-life balance	this involves the minimization of work-related stress, and establishing stable and a sustainable way to work while maintaining health and well being
school leader or school administrator	a person who is employed in a position of authority in the K-12 educational setting, typical titles include: principals, assistant principals, deans, and coordinators
Isolation	the condition of being alone
self-care	the practice of taking action to preserve or improve one's own health
Resiliency	the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties
social support	the perception and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people
self-reflection	serious thought/assessment of one's character, actions, ways of working
Mentor	an experienced and trusted advisor or guide
administrator preparation program/principal preparation program	university programs that provide education and experience as a pathway to administrative/principal licensure
administrator induction program	programs or protocols organized by school districts as a way of onboarding or preparing new school leaders
burn-out	a state resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been managed, characterized by energy depletion, exhaustion, and distance or cynicism regarding one's job
Turnover	the rate at which employees leave a workforce and are replaced
coping strategies	an action or a series of actions or a thought process used in meeting a stressful situation
stress management techniques	tools or ways to control, reduce and cope with stress
Purpose	having a set of goals, values, or vision that propels one forward in life
Recentering	to return to your center or core values or getting back in touch with one's original purpose
non-evaluative	a person or situation that is not evaluating one's performance or skills

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*“When you ask what I need ... that was like an awakening for me. It was meeting with people that are dealing with the same stuff outside of my building who I can be honest and straightforward with ... because sometimes it’s just so isolating.”*

*Tyler, second-year school administrator*

### **Stress and New School Leaders**

New school leaders are under pressure to perform immediately, despite receiving little to no support from their school districts. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) provided a widely used definition of a stressful situations as “one in which the demands of the situation threaten to exceed the resources of the individual” (p. 628). Often, the content leaders learn, in their administrative preparation programs, is not generalizable to the actual demands of the job. Boyland (2011) states that there is a point for an individual when the demands outweigh his or her coping skills and it results in stress. When stress becomes chronic, administrators suffer physically, mentally, and emotionally. Retaining healthy school leaders is a high stakes endeavor because according to an emerging body of research, school leadership is second only to teaching as it relates to impact on student learning (Day et al., 2008). Unfortunately, according to Bartoletti and Connelly (2013), principal development remains a low priority in most educational policy agendas. Even districts actively offering their new school leaders support are not meeting the needs of those immersed in this imperative and demanding profession. On this basis, this study seeks to identify the sources of stress new school leaders face and examine viable coping mechanisms, to ensure longevity in the field and in turn, optimize growth for students.

## Statement of the Problem

Stress among new school leaders is contributing to turnover and this impacts student progress. According to Levin et al. (2020), the Learning Policy Institute identified five essential reasons for principal exodus, including inadequate preparation and professional development, poor working conditions, insufficient salaries, lack of decision-making authority, and ineffective accountability policies (p. 3). The role of the principal has evolved over the years to encompass several additional responsibilities and higher levels of accountability. The gravity of those expectations has proven to be highly stressful, especially for new school leaders. The stress levels in schools can manifest as physical and psychological conditions in principals (Sorenson, 2007). All too frequently, chronic stress leads to burnout and new school leaders leave the profession. According to a national survey conducted in 2017, approximately 18 percent of principals had left their positions (Levin et al., 2020). School principals are essential to enhancing teachers' practice as well as motivating faculty, which creates a positive school climate. Levin et al. (2020) suggested building these conditions takes time and a consistent strong leader. When schools experience frequent turnover in leadership, there are lower gains in student achievement. Therefore, stress among school leaders is a serious problem afflicting the K-12 school system, requiring attention, and resolution. Over time, the principalship has evolved from a building-level managerial role to a highly skilled instructional leader. Due to the dynamic and ever-changing role of school leaders, preparation programs are not always applicable or relevant, nor are the school district's induction programs. According to Mitgang & Gill (2012), "Aspiring principals need pre-service training that prepares them to lead improved instruction and school change, not just manage buildings" (p. 2). The Wallace Foundation's multiyear,

multisite study (Turnbull et al., 2016) identified four interrelated necessary components of policy and practice for preparing high-quality school principals:

- standards that specify what principals need to know and do, which undergird principal training, hiring, and on-the-job evaluation and support.
- stronger pre-service training.
- more selective and rigorous hiring procedures; and
- on-the-job evaluation and support designed to help novice principals perform well, especially in improving instruction (p. i).

Despite the increased efforts by universities and school districts to offer more support to new school leaders, there appeared to be a lack of focus on the whole person, including the implications of stress, coping strategies, and overall well-being.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to:

- (1) provide the opportunity for new school leaders to communicate what challenged them the most in their roles and what supports or structures they needed to remain and thrive in this profession,
- (2) to collect and analyze data on the specific stressors new school leaders identified and the coping strategies that are proving to be advantageous, and
- (3) to complete an extensive review of research studies related to the impact of stress and stress management techniques.

Current attrition rates in this field are alarming and this negatively influences school climate, culture, as well as student and faculty growth. This study is aimed at identifying the stressors that lead to ill health, burnout, and ultimately exiting the profession all together. This study assessed

the impact stress has had on a group of new school leaders. Through participant experiences, data collection via semi-structured focus groups, and data analysis, this study discusses the extent to which stress has affected this group of new school leaders. The study was conducted over a five-year timespan, which sheds light on how administrators morph and grow as they learn coping mechanisms during their journeys. After establishing themes that emerged in the focus groups regarding stressors and coping mechanisms, I completed an in-depth literature review analyzing the physical and psychological impact of stress, the different sources of school leaders' stress, and an extensive evaluation of the research previously conducted on these topics. Through a detailed account of this process, I offer insight on best practices for preparing and supporting new school leaders for universities and school districts to consider. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What do school leaders identify as their sources of stress and how does that stress influence them psychologically and physically early in their administrative careers?
2. What coping strategies or stress management techniques do school leaders employ in order to stay healthy within this profession?

Given the content of these questions, I deem the characteristics of qualitative methodology the most relevant to gathering in-depth data in answering these particular questions. Agee (2008) also described the initial question as a significant entry point for many qualitative researchers. Reflection and refinement regarding the research question are essential to the qualitative process.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research relies on the researcher's first-hand accounts. This approach rejects the dichotomy of subject and their experience (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative researchers often

seek to make sense of actions, narratives, and the ways in which they intersect (Glesne, 2011). Qualitative research is said to be exploratory in nature because the researchers do not have preconceived notions of what the findings will elicit. In qualitative studies, the participant size is usually smaller to allow for intimate observation or comprehensive questioning. One advantage of qualitative methods is the opportunity to go deeper and gather rich information. Additionally, this methodology is reflective in nature. Qualitative researchers investigate their own bias, viewpoints, experiences, prejudices, and assumptions to not affect the process (Merriam, 2019).

As it pertains to my dissertation topic, stress and school leadership, most of the published research on this topic are quantitative studies. Hochbein and Smeaton (2018) indicated the prevalence of quantitative methodology among school leadership journal articles is significant compared to other methodologies. They discuss how these quantitative studies tended to fall short by leaving out the detailed picture of the variables. In the studies reviewed in chapter two, the ones I deemed the most insightful were the qualitative inquiries that utilized interviews. As Glesne (2011) explained, part of our duty as a researcher is to figure out which philosophical and theoretical perspectives inform the kind of work you choose to do (p. 5). In determining which road to take in terms of data collection and research design, it was clear that I would utilize a qualitative approach to my dissertation. My decision to use qualitative methodology is based upon the following characteristics of this methodology: (1) the smaller participant size allows the researcher to ask more comprehensive questions, (2) it is exploratory in nature, (3) the researcher can probe deeper into the issues, (4) the reflective nature, (5) concentration on participants' point of view, and (7) use of narrative analysis.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The Stress and Coping Theory developed by Lazarus and colleagues (Folkman et al., 1986) encapsulates the theoretical underpinnings of this study identifying the stressors and coping strategies of novice school leaders. This theory was first introduced in 1984 by Folkman and Lazarus (Folkman et al., 1986). Lazarus refers to stress as a two-way process, involving the production of stressors in the environment and the response from the person who is subject to these environmental stressors. This conception of stress led to the Theory of Cognitive Appraisal. Folkman et al. (1986) defined Cognitive Appraisal Theory as a process through which the person evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment is relevant to his or her well-being, and if so, in what ways (p. 992). Lazarus further explains that cognitive appraisal occurs when a person considers two factors contributing to his or her response to stress, including the threat the stress poses to that individual and the resources he or she has to minimize, tolerate, or eradicate the stressor (Folkman et al., 1986). Throughout this study, specific stressors of school administrators are identified. In the first focus groups of this longitudinal study, the magnitude of the stress outweighs the coping mechanisms they employ. As time progresses, participants gain experience, confidence, and develop an arsenal of strategies to cope with the on-going stress they encounter in their leadership roles. Even though the participants do not refer to Stress and Coping Theory or Cognitive Appraisal Theory, similarly they developed mechanisms to appraise the stressor and identified the strategy they used to minimize or tolerate the stress they experienced. Frequently throughout the data, the strategies are identified as compartmentalizing, letting go, growing numb, or being callused, as ways to manage or shape the stress in their day to day lives as school leaders. Additionally, these leaders found prioritizing, having strong social support, self-reflection, recentering with their purpose,

and setting boundaries to be crucial elements to their tenure. However, the journey was raw and difficult, with some leaders considering leaving the profession. Through this stress and coping theoretical lens, I propose that new school leaders have holistic preparation programs and induction programs that provide opportunities to 1) understand the transactional process of stress and the role of cognition and physiology in coping with stress, 2) explicitly learn multiple coping strategies, and 3) develop supportive, non-evaluative relationships.

### **Narrative Analysis**

In particular, I sought to understand school leaders' viewpoints and intended to tell their story by lifting up their voices. The act of telling other people's stories is powerful. As Grbich (2013) explained, eliciting narratives of personal experience is seen as a more natural form of communication, often providing the researcher with a lengthy response in the form of a story. As a veteran school administrator, I found an inquiry like stress and school leadership as an opportunity as a practitioner-researcher to better understand the issues at hand in order to shape policy and practice. By conducting qualitative research, the inquiry will be centered upon the issues of those researched. The qualitative paradigm generally explores the phenomenon within the participants' organic setting, while concentrating on the participants' viewpoint. Agee (2008) suggested the reflective nature of qualitative inquiry underscores the strengths of this approach.

### **The Significance of this Study**

A plethora of research studies have been conducted affirming stress leads to burnout and attrition among school leaders (Bauer & Brazer, 2013; Beusaert et al., 2016; Boyland, 2011; Brock & Grady, 2002; Friedman, 2002; Koenig, Roger, & Spect, 2017). There are several factors which set this study apart from those proceeding studies.

This project was a longitudinal study, that spanned five years. When the participants attended the first focus group in 2017, they were in the first through third year of their new administrative positions. During the last focus group in 2021, the participants were in their fourth through sixth year in their administrative positions. This timeframe has been highly valuable in analyzing the data and establishing patterns as school leaders grow and develop with experience.

The participants in this study knew each other prior to the focus groups. I believe this allowed for a deeper level of comfortability, openness, honesty, and vulnerability that allowed for authenticity in their answers. The use of semi-structured questions during the focus groups allowed participants to expand and give rich details of their experiences. In fact, the focus groups served as a cathartic outlet for the participants. In other words, the data collection process had a positive influence on the school leaders in this project. Participants shared it was a reflective, reassuring, and supportive learning experience. Whereas most other research studies on this topic used surveys and Likert-type scales to derive the data, which is often one-dimensional, problematic, biased, and limiting. Pimentel (2010) detailed several problems associated with the use of Likert scales. Likert scales may elicit distorted answers because respondents tend to avoid extreme responses. This practice is called central tendency bias. Respondents may also agree with statements, called acquiescence bias. Respondents may engage in social desirability bias, portraying themselves or the organizations where they work for as more favorable than actuality.

Another unique quality of this study is the depth to which the identified stressors are examined. By drilling deeper into each source of stress, comprising; pressure to perform, compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress, work life balance, and isolation, this allowed a more thorough understanding of the participants' lived experiences as new school leaders. Similarly, the extensive research conducted regarding the variety of stress management strategies

provides essential information that could be utilized to develop comprehensive and holistic administrator preparation and induction programs.

Finally, the most distinctive feature of this study is the focus on the well-being of the novice school leaders. By utilizing a holistic lens, this project puts school leaders' mental and physical health at the nucleus of this study. Frequently the impact of stress is mentioned as a side effect of other policy or financial driven issues, but typically not unpacked to this level of detail as it relates to the impact on the administrators' welfare. Additionally, the investigation into solutions to this phenomenon considers the whole person by investigating coping strategies that include reflection, social support, self-care, metacognition, and resiliency.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Despite the increased level of attention to supporting new school leaders over the past few decades, significant gaps in the research literature exist. Although it is surmised a change in school leadership influences student achievement, quantitative research in this realm is sparse. Miller (2009) argued that regardless of the current emphasis on principals as instruments of change in continuous improvement efforts, much remains unknown about how school leadership affects student achievement. In her study, Miller (2009) investigated the causes and consequences of principal turnover as they pertain to student learning, finding dips prior to principal departures and subsequently after new leaders take over. This study, like similar studies, does not elicit definitive answers regarding principal turbulence and student outcomes. These data tend to beg for more investigation as to the reasons for the departure and wonderings around principal performance prior to departure. Is the change in leadership causing the dips in achievement or are there other factors contributing to this decline? This is clearly an area that needs to be researched further.

Even though a great deal of research has been conducted around compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress in the helping professions, relatively little has been published about the impact this has on school leaders. Lane (2018) stated a great deal of research has been completed regarding compassion fatigue as it relates to care givers, social workers, school counselors and teachers. Research regarding the impact of compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress on school leaders is needed to fully understand the implications on principals' well-being and how that subsequently impacts their longevity, school climate, and achievement outcomes.

Additionally, when analyzing social supports and mentorships as a stress management strategy for novice school leaders, it was noted only 15% of the studies identified a theoretical perspective (Ehrich et al., 2001). Viable solutions must be grounded in theory. There were a limited number of studies which established a theoretical framework for both critical reflection theory and social support theory as it pertains to school leadership. Therefore, more studies are needed in this area to draw upon, evaluate, and make comparisons.

### **The Limitations of this Study**

As mentioned, one of the advantageous features of this project was the familiarity of the focus group participants. Although this level of comfortability appeared to enable the participants to provide authentic, descriptive answers during the focus groups, it is important to note participants may have answered questions with social desirability biases. This refers to the tendency of some respondents to report an answer in a way they deem to be more socially acceptable than how they genuinely think or feel. According to Fisher (1993), not only is social desirability bias common in focus groups, but it can lead to misleading research results through

receiving attenuated or inflated answers. Although, I do not think this was a prevalent factor in this study, it is a possibility to be considered regarding the validity of the data collected.

The nine focus group participants in this study were middle class, heterosexual individuals approximately between the ages of thirty and forty-five. One participant identified as Latina and another participant identified as Latino and white. The other seven identified as white. Considerations around focus group participant demographics are complex. The challenge with this homogeneous composition is that without a diverse group of individuals participating in the research, we will not be able to know if the results can be applied to all people equally. Conversely, some researchers claim homogeneity in age, gender, and ethnicity increases participant compatibility in turn making them more comfortable with each other, allowing them to speak more freely (Greenwood, Ellmers, & Holley, 2014). The demographic of the focus group participants was neither completely heterogeneous nor completely homogeneous. This may be a limiting factor of this study.

Additionally, the focus groups interviews ranged in size from two to five people, with nine total participants. This intimate setting can be beneficial in fostering rich discussions and generating descriptive answers to questions, but some researchers argue the validity and generalizability of this study may be compromised by such a small sample size. Vasileiou et al. (2018) were proponents of small sample sizes in qualitative research, claiming they support the depth of the analysis and are fundamental to this mode of inquiry. Sample size in qualitative research has been long debated. For the purposes of this study, the advantages of the sample size outweigh the disadvantages, although it is noteworthy to consider the small sample size does impact the generalizability of this study.

## **Organization of this Study**

This dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter one is the introduction. Within Chapter two, the literature review, I examined research on the impact chronic stress has on health, multiple existing studies on stress and school administration, exploring specific stressors including pressure to perform, compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress, work life balance, and isolation, as well as stress management strategies—such as metacognition, mentorships, and self-care. In chapter three, the method of inquiry, the participants, setting, plan of inquiry and method of data analysis are explained, trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethical considerations regarding the study are examined. Chapter four contains findings from the longitudinal data collection and analysis. Chapter five, discussion, the findings are summarized and situated within implications for future practice in preparing and onboarding new school leaders and recommendations for future research are provided. In order to give readers an understanding of the concepts that will be discussed throughout this study, I have provided a Definitions of Terms.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, findings from research questions exploring on stress and school administration are examined. Such findings include: How does stress impact school administrators professionally, physically, and mentally? What is known about compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress among this group? Considering the current performance expectations, how are school administrators responding to this pressure? Can a work life balance truly exist for these professionals? How does perceived isolation contribute to their stress?

Next, I explore multiple coping strategies and stress management techniques, including problem-focused, appraisal-focused, emotion-focused, as well as self-care, resiliency, reflection, social support, and mentorships. Then, I identify the relevant gaps in our understanding of stressors school leaders' experiences and the need for more research regarding the use of specific strategies to address stress among new school leaders. I conclude by identifying the implications of these specific stressors as it relates to novice school leaders, school impact, and longevity in this field.

### **Research on Stress and School Administrators**

#### **Contextual Framework**

Researchers have established that stress among school leaders is prevalent (Bayor, 2016; Beausaert et al., 2016; Boyland, 2011; Friedman, 2002). The relationship between school administrators' stress and their abilities to succeed in their roles is important to acknowledge. According to an emerging body of research, school leadership is second only to teaching as it relates to impact on student learning. Leithwood et al. (2010) said, "School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation,

commitment, and working conditions” (p. 5). Therefore, the retention of high-quality school leaders is a high stakes endeavor. According to Levin and Bradley (2019), in 2016-2017, the national average of tenure of principals was four years, with 35 percent of principals being at their school less than two years (p. 2). Queen and Schumacher (2006) cited The National Association of Elementary School Principals report, indicating 75% of principals experience stress-related symptoms that can affect their physical, emotional, and mental health. Similarly, Brock and Grady (2002) found the principalship to have such high incidence of exhaustion and stress that it is resulting in reduced mental and physical stamina among practitioners.

### **Stress and Health**

*“I think physically it wears on a person. I know that it does mentally and emotionally. It’s sort of like, I guess going out on a battlefield.”*

High School Principal,  
Howard & Mallory (2008)

There is a direct correlation between stress and physical and mental health. Due to the nature of their roles, school leaders experience a high level of stress. Each school leader responds to stress uniquely. Cox and Griffiths (2010) discussed how transaction stress theory proposes that different levels and duration of stress response, an individual experiences, is dependent upon the individual’s environmental factors and ability to cope with the stressor. Boyland (2011) stated there is a point for an individual at which the demands outweigh his or her coping skills and it results in stress. It is often said that the first year in school administration is like drinking water from a fire hose. Novice school leaders experience many stressful events for which their principal preparation programs have not prepared them. Multiple studies, over the last few decades, have been conducted specifically looking at the side effects of stress which include,

anxiety, low productivity, increased absenteeism, high blood pressure, depression, and dissonance (Cox & Griffiths, 2010). These side effects of stress are seen in school leaders. To this point, Queen & Queen (2004) stated school leaders working in a culture of stress report psychological and somatic health issues including headaches, weakness, fatigue, irritability, depression, hypertension, and coronary artery disease.

### **Chronic Workplace Stress**

Chronic stress leads to burnout among school leaders. Colbert (2008) described how some levels of stress are not harmful and are a normal part of life, however high levels of ongoing stress can lead to the excessive release of stress hormones that lead to chronic stress. Additionally, Colbert (2008) explained how unmanaged, excessive stress can lead to mental health problems. While all school leaders are exposed to stressful situations, if exhaustion levels are not reduced after acute stress becomes chronic stress, this results in burnout (Queen & Queen, 2004). This phenomenon has been named burnout by the World Health Organization. In the International Classification of Diseases, burnout is referred to as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed (Williams, 2020). Burnout among educators is widespread.

Walker (2019) described how many educators who complain of burnout or stress induced exhaustion are often considered weak or unable to cope, being offered little in the form of support from school districts. However, he further described how some districts are making strides in recognizing the pressure educators are under and they are making efforts to provide support. In a mixed method study conducted in Israel, Friedman (2002) mapped the common work-related stressors principals encounter as a way of looking at antecedent predictors of burnout. The study included 821 elementary and secondary principals. The participants were

male (42%) and female (55%) school leaders (some failed to indicate gender). Their average years of experience in a leadership role was 10 years. Participants in this study completed an open-ended questionnaire, an in-depth interview, and an anonymous self-report. The questionnaire measured emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment. During the interview, principals were asked to describe their stressful experiences at work. The self-report gathered demographic and background information, as well as a test battery designed to measure work stressors using a 33-item scale and burnout using a 23-item scale. Friedman utilized multiple analysis of variance, multiple linear regression, and discriminant function analysis in processing this data set. The findings in this study indicated principals experienced burnout from four distinct sources of stress:

- (1) stressors due to unrealistic demands from parents;
- (2) stressors from underperforming teachers;
- (3) stressors from work overload; and
- (4) stressors from inadequate performance of the school support staff.

The data indicated the stressor that impacted burnout the most was underperforming teachers, specifically the lack of discipline and noncompliance with the principals' directives. Friedman's conclusions, based upon his findings, pointed to the discrepancy between what school leaders perceive as their role or what they plan to handle and the reality on the ground. He points out the leaders who are experiencing the lowest levels of stress, and subsequently less burnout, have more realistic expectations of the job and have the skills to cope with challenges related to their positions. What makes this study important is the correlation between chronic stress and burnout in school leaders. The more intensified the principal's perception is of their stress, the higher the incidence of burnout.

## **Pressure to Perform**

To better understand the underpinnings of the stress school leaders face, I will drill deeper into some specific stressors. One major contributor to stress among school leaders is the increased pressure to perform at a highly competent level in an incredibly demanding role that continues to evolve. Devita (2010) stated,

In today's climate of heightened expectations, principals are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. They need to be educational visionaries; instructional and curriculum leaders; assessment experts; disciplinarians; community builders; public relations experts; budget analysts; facility managers; special program managers; and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. (p. 2)

Given this unwieldy list of responsibilities, it is not surprising school leaders have acknowledged the challenges in their roles that have manifested into chronic stress. Boyland (2011) suggested the principalship has been considered a challenging position for many years, yet principals are reporting escalating pressure as well as intensive demands for their time due to the growing list of accountability standards creating a culture of stress among principals. Over the last two decades, we have seen various legislation, such as *No Child Left Behind* (2002), *Race to the Top* (2009), and *Every Students Succeeds Act* (2015), that have changed the day-to-day duties and increased the level of accountability for building leaders. As Berkowicz and Myers (2016) describe, the principalship has evolved from being building managers, mainly addressing discipline, facility, safety, and supervision to 21<sup>st</sup> century instructional leaders, responsible for developing teachers' practices and high stakes assessment outcomes. They further suggest that a principal's growing list of responsibilities is a herculean task that cannot be managed by a single human.

Most studies on school leaders and stress have been surveys aimed at identifying the most common stressors among principals. For example, Klocko and Wells' (2015) research project sought to collect data on workload expectations and stressors principals face due to the growing duties of building principals and concerns for attrition rates of principals. The researchers implemented an online survey using a Likert-type scale with principals (n=708) from midwestern United States. Their results indicated not enough time to complete tasks, constant interruptions, and the volume of paperwork were the primary stressors of the principalship. The results also denoted individual responsibility, feeling overwhelmed with job demands, and the stress that resulted from this pressure was paramount.

Another larger longitudinal study conducted by Beusaert et al. (2016), studied the health and well-being of Australian school principals (n=3,572) and specifically investigated whether social support from colleagues, supervisors, and the community played a role in the level of stress and burnout principals experienced. This was also an online survey that utilized a Likert-scale and measured how tense, irritable, and stressed people were. The results indicated that despite social support from colleagues, supervisors, and the community, principals were negatively impacted by national policy, job pressure, and task demands. Given the role and scope of responsibilities principals currently have, the pressure to perform is resulting in high levels of stress among school leaders.

### **Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Traumatic Stress**

Students facing a multitude of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) bring this trauma with them to school. This trauma has long term neurophysiological effects impacting every aspect of how a student functions in school (Borntrager et al., 2012). Therefore, administrators experience compassion fatigue and Secondary Traumatic Stress when working extensively with

these students. Lavasova and Raczova (2017) explained the origins of the term compassion fatigue, which was first recognized in the nursing profession, when a culmination of constant and intense contact with clients goes from compassion to fatigue from stress to complete exhaustion. Figley (1995) describes Secondary Traumatic Stress as the transfer that occurs when helpers are exposed to the traumatic experiences of the children and adults we strive to help. Compassion fatigue has a duality. The first part involves exhaustion, frustration, anger, and depression typical of burnout. The other component is Secondary Traumatic Stress, which involves feelings driven by fear and work-related trauma. As Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2016) explained, working in the helping profession involves making highly skilled professional attachments and separations over and over again with person after person. They further describe how this work takes a toll because establishing and maintaining these relationships take enormous energy from the practitioner, as well as the distress we vicariously feel from those we attempt to support. It is theorized that compassion fatigue occurs when compassion stress is not buffered by an individual's sense of satisfaction and the ability to disengage (Figley, 1995).

Three factors contribute to the level of compassion fatigue one experiences: prolonged exposure, traumatic recollections, and life disruptions. Since educators are frequently involved in situations where they see or hear about extreme suffering, they are highly susceptible to compassion fatigue (Peeples, 2020). School leaders are frequently the ones directly supporting the students with intensive traumatic backgrounds, as these students often struggle to maintain in the classroom, which often leads to Principals experiencing Secondary Traumatic Stress. This places significant additional demands and stress on the principal role. According to Stephen Brock, school psychology professor at California State University, symptoms of secondhand

exposure to trauma are the same as direct exposure (Peeples, 2020). Malen (1994) described how trauma can be a major source of stress for principals.

In understanding the lived experiences of school leaders, one must identify the day-to-day stress they endure due to the events that happen within their buildings and to the community in which they serve. For instance, Lane (2018) detailed some of the incidents he endured as a middle school principal, describing the decapitation of a student from a four-wheeler accident, the arrest of a teacher for sexual misconduct with a minor, the forced resignation of a teacher after pushing a difficult student, a teacher's son dying from a brain tumor, and the arrest and expulsion of students for drug and weapon possession. Lane continued to explain these situations led to physical and emotional duress which developed into compassion fatigue. Another critical example includes information derived from a series of professional development classes provided to school personnel regarding compassion fatigue and self-care in Oklahoma City. After the course concluded, participants completed a series of self-reports providing valuable information on this topic. Compassion fatigue affected a great deal of the school district personnel, including 80 percent of school principals and 56 percent of district level administrators (Elliott et al., 2018). Additionally, educators often experience compassion fatigue due to the imbalance of students' needs and what the system can support (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). To illustrate this imbalance, one educator described her experience in working with a student who had been locked in a closet for the four years prior to his arrival at her school and the intense emotions she felt working with a student with an extremely traumatic background and her desire and inability to meet his complex needs (Elliott et al., 2018). Elliott et al. (2018) shared another educator's experience about a student that reported her stepfather for molesting her siblings. After the educator called child protective services, the parents forced the children to

sleep in the garage during winter. She spent every night worrying and hoping this student was safe.

In a few research studies, that examined the prevalence and impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress among educators, the findings were significant. Using a screening tool called the secondary traumatic stress scale, Borntrager et al. (2012) searched for indicators among public school educators in various roles (n=229). Approximately 77 percent of their students were moderately to severely traumatized; and 75 percent of these adults reported symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress. Lawson et al. (2019) conducted qualitative interviews with a sample of the participants, from a previously conducted study by Borntrager, et al. (2012), establishing that 75 percent of the participants were considering a career change, retirement, or change in school district, implicating that Secondary Traumatic Stress can cause turnover in the field of education. In another study, Koenig et al. (2017) looked at a sample group of Canadian educators (n=64). They offered a voluntary two-hour workshop about emotional labor and consequences and utilized a focus group platform to gain information about the participants' experiences. They found that 70.3 percent were experiencing moderate to severe Secondary Traumatic Stress symptoms, to a level that required clinical intervention. Although there is limited research on this topic among school leaders, the studies that have been conducted indicate that compassion fatigue and Secondary Traumatic Stress are highly impactful stressors.

### **Work-Life Balance**

*“The time demands certainly take away from your family. There are weeks when I spent more than 90 hours at school.”*

High School Principal,  
Howard & Mallory (2008)

The topic of work-life balance among school leaders has been researched extensively and strategies to cope with these challenges have been exhaustively established in the literature. Despite these efforts, it is questionable if maintaining a healthy work-life balance is realistic in this dynamic and intense occupation. What is heard time and time again from administrators, is how difficult it is to have a healthy work-life balance. A National Education Union study was conducted in 2019 in the United Kingdom and the results confirmed a long-term trend among educators, as it found that 40 percent of respondents predicted they would not be working in education by 2024. These high attrition rates often come down to one thing: work-life balance. The survey results revealed 56% of respondents believe their work-life balance has gotten worse or much worse in the past year. Long working hours create stress due to the impact on their health and family life. One respondent stated, “Working 70 hours a week for many years has meant my health and family life have suffered. I am getting out before the job kills me.” When participants were asked why they would be leaving the profession, 62% indicated workload as the reason.

Barsh and Cranston (2011) implied leaders ought to strive for a managed disequilibrium rather than strive for work-life balance because there are times when work will dominate most of our time, imposing on our personal lives. In fact, these authors stated trying to find this work-life balance can create more stress and pressure because it is essentially unattainable. White (2014) echoed the same sentiment; when discussing the limitless advice on how to achieve work-life balance, by suggesting one is setting yourself up for even more stress when you cannot achieve the impossible. In a qualitative study conducted in 2011, Boyland explored job-related stress among elementary principals (n=193). Of the respondents, 38.5 percent were found to be experiencing high job stress and 53.6 percent reported moderate job stress. While 69 percent

perceived job stress had affected their overall health and wellness. The open-ended responses were grouped using content analysis. When asked what they found stressful about their positions, most participants denoted task overload. Specific answers were frequently related to work-life balance struggles. One participant stated, “There is simply not enough time to work on your own agenda or have a balance between home and school.” In a qualitative study conducted by Juma, Simatwa, and Ayodo (2016), among female administrators in Kenya (n=168), factors influencing their stress were researched using a five-point Likert-scale. They found “workload” and “time to get the work done” to be the factors with the highest influence on stress. Another notable source of information on this topic includes a white paper written in 2016. School leader delegates from across the globe convened in Toronto for the third Annual International Symposium on the Role of the Professional Associations for School Leaders. The symposium focused on the research on the intensification of the school leader’s role, their work-life balance, and well-being. As a result of this event, a white paper was written. According to this white paper, we are facing a crisis in principal well-being on a global scale due to workload intensification that has led to an unhealthy work-life balance (Ontario Principals’ Council, 2017). Across the studied history of work-life balance among school leaders, it appears most do not manage to maintain this equilibrium.

### **Isolation**

*“It’s very lonely. There are things you can’t tell another living soul. ...everybody’s problems are your problems. But your problems aren’t anybody else’s problems, and you don’t have anywhere to lean. There is nobody to lean on. They are all leaning on you.”*

High School Principal,  
Howard & Mallory (2008)

School leaders report feelings of isolation that lead to stress and burnout. It's lonely at the top. Although this axiom seems ironic for professionals who interact with people all day long, it does ring true for many principals. Howard and Mallory (2008) discuss how principals are faced with the juxtaposition of working in a people-oriented position and the overload that comes along with that, while feeling isolated in their professional and personal lives. Howard and Mallory (2008) conducted a qualitative study to better understand the experiences of isolation and their coping strategies, among high school principals in Georgia, as an attempt to support the recruitment and retention of quality school leaders. Interviews were conducted to provide the lived experiences of ten high school principals. The researchers selected the participants with the intention of having a purposeful convenience sample with varied demographic descriptions to increase the possibility of a wide range of perspectives. Half of participants were females and half were males. Two participants were African American. The other participants were white. Marital statuses varied. All participants had been in a principal role from five to 14 years. Some participants worked in rural areas, while others were working in urban/suburban areas. The interview instrument was comprised of 16 questions used to guide respondents in describing their experience with professional isolation. The interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. Participants reviewed the narrative data and clarified responses. The data were coded for reoccurring themes and patterns using QSR NUD.IST software. The researcher then explored meanings and divergent perspectives. The results indicated all participants had experienced isolation and loneliness in varying degrees during their careers. Their isolation was most prevalent in the beginning of their principalship. Eight principals reported moderate to intense perceptions of isolation, while two principals reported random occurrences. The two principals who expressed the highest level of isolation were planning on retiring at the end of the school

year. The findings were further solidified into the culture of principalship that influenced their isolation, which included, time demands; fishbowl existence; accountability demands; role and duties of the principal; and relationship with the central office.

Howard and Mallory (2008) also provided approaches that these principals employed to cope with the isolation, including: networking; confidants; support systems; spousal support; personal strategies; enlarging the circle; distributed leadership; and moral purpose (p. 20). A quantitative study was conducted to look at the impact of isolation on principals new to the role, to support this group of public educators. The researchers of this study, Bauer and Brazer (2013) described the isolation associated with the principalship as less to do with structural reality than the emotional response to the experience. The purpose of their study was three-fold: (1) looking at isolation as a predictor of job satisfaction for new principals, (2) testing the level of impact antecedent predictors are influenced by isolation, and (3) determining the relationship between isolation and the quality of new principals' work experiences. The 86 participants were selected because they were new to the role, across the state of Louisiana. These principals were working in varied settings, including rural, urban, and suburban, as well as across building levels with more than half working at the elementary level. Male principals were 29% of the sample, while females were 70% of the sample. The demographic information varied as well; 33% African American, 2% Hispanic, 64% white, and 1% multiethnic. The researchers used five survey scales. Each scale measured a variable: role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, social support, coaching, isolation, and job satisfaction.

The instrument used to collect the data was comprised of a 17-item instrument using a five-point Likert scale for responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This survey was completed by participants online. Bauer and Brazer (2013) then used regression

analysis to determine if isolation mediates these and the outcome relationship between these independent variables and the outcome of interest—in this case, job satisfaction (p. 165). To analyze the data, researchers tested the relationships between the independent variables and the mediator, isolation. The findings suggest that social support has a large effect size on isolation ( $r = -.53$ ). Whereas role ambiguity ( $r = .22$ ), and coaching ( $r = .17$ ) have small to moderate effects. Role conflict and role overload were not found to be a strong predictor of isolation. The regression analysis showed that isolation intervenes in the relationship between social supports and job satisfaction. Bauer and Brazer (2013) concluded their article by stating when job satisfaction decreases as a result of isolation, principals are more likely to leave the practice. Like Howard and Mallory (2008), these researchers saw an opportunity to provide coping strategies to combat isolation among principals and ultimately retain effective leaders in our schools.

### **Research on Stress Management Techniques and Coping Strategies**

It is essential for new school leaders to learn how to cope with the stressors of their profession proactively and adaptively. Lazarus (1966) established stress as a product of transaction between a person including multiple systems (cognitive, psychological, affective, physiological, and neurological) as one interacts with their complex environment. School leaders need to possess multiple adaptive strategies to adequately address the chronic stress of their jobs. By incorporating mindful practices, new school leaders will be better equipped to lead their schools and stay in the field. Aspinwall (2001) suggested proactive coping is a combination of anticipation and self-regulation where people identify potential sources of stress and take steps ahead of time either to prevent or to decrease the impact. These stressors can have serious consequences. Even though distress among educational leaders is well documented (Boyland,

2011; Friedman, 2002; Klocko & Wells, 2015; Lashway, 2003; Sorenson, 2007), little has been done to address this aspect of the job during induction practices. The following section explores multiple adaptive strategies to manage stress in healthy ways.

### **Problem-focused, Appraisal-focused, and Emotional-focused Coping Strategies**

According to Snyder (2001), coping mechanisms fall into three categories: appraisal-focused, which affects thoughts associated with the stressor; problem-focused, which affects the stressor itself; and emotion-focused, which affects the feelings associated with the stressor.

Problem-focused strategies are the most straight-forward of the different strategies. Essentially it means to identify the problem and the solution and act on this to eliminate or solve the problem that is causing the source of stress. McLeod (2009) included problem-solving, time management, and obtaining instrumental social support when discussing problem-focused coping strategies.

This approach is ideal because it addresses the root cause of the problem and provides a sustainable solution.

It comes as no surprise, many problems in education do not have an immediate solution. When there are challenges outside our control, we need to access a different coping strategy. Appraisal-focused coping strategies has to do with how we cognitively view and interpret a problem. When one cannot readily solve the problem, they modify how they think about it. One must work on their mindset or filter the way we interpret the situation to decrease the stress it causes. Every person responds differently to stressors based upon this appraisal. Klocko and Wells (2015) illustrated how some principals may use maladaptive coping strategies when faced with problems they cannot solve. Maladaptive coping strategies may come from feeling threatened, fearful, resentful, or simply because the individual is under pressure in the public view and the community may be expecting a response or they lack the coping strategies needed

at the moment. As an alternative, Klucko and Wells (2015) suggested a mindful approach which incorporates stepping back, observing, and letting a stressful situation just be instead of reacting. By reframing their thinking around a particular challenge one can ask reflective questions to help be more aware of utilizing the appraisal coping strategy such as: (1) How else could you view this situation? or (2) How can you change your response to this problem? It is important to mention that appraisal-focused coping strategies do not remove stressors, but they can be highly effective in managing one's stress levels.

Emotion-focused coping strategies address the associated feelings one has with the stressor. This strategy is used to release, distract, or manage one's mental state when facing stress. This type of stress management strategy is used to reduce the negative emotions related to the stress. This can be used when the source of stress is outside of one's control. Some adaptive examples of emotion-focused coping include, expressing strong emotions by talking or journaling, seeking social supports, relaxation techniques, and mindfulness practices.

### **Self-care**

Professional quality of life is often defined by the way school leaders engage in self-care. Bloomquist et al. (2016) delineated self-care as a practice requiring individuals and organizations to purposefully engage in behaviors that contribute to wellness and reduced stress (p. 294). These researchers named and unpacked the five primary domains of self-care practice: physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and professional. Physical self-care includes exercise, adequate sleep, and a healthy diet. Psychological self-care may involve seeking therapy or journaling about your experiences. Emotional self-care can be finding humor in a situation and spending time with friends or family. Meditating and praying are examples of spiritual self-care. Whereas professional self-care relates to setting appropriate boundaries, seeking support, and

advocating for one's needs. In the results of their study, professional, emotional, and spiritual self-care practices were predictive of lower levels of burnout (Bloomquist, 2006, p. 307).

Consequently, preparation and induction programs that incorporate self-care strategies can provide new school leaders with a life-long skill set, not only to help navigate their challenges, but to prioritize their well-being.

### **Resiliency**

Happiness and resilience are related (Allison, 2012). In a study of school leaders, those that rated themselves as a nine or ten out of ten in happiness, scored in the incredibly resilient range twice as often as those leaders who rated themselves as a one or two in happiness (Allison 2012). Resiliency is a human phenomenon that cannot be easily explained. Resilience is defined as a personal quality that predisposes individuals to bounce back in the face of adversity.

Research over the last 10 years has introduced multiple resilience-enhancing habits as a means to provide emotional stability during difficult times and increase the chances of emerging from challenges feeling centered (Grave, 2021). If resiliency is a predisposition, can all school leaders access this coping strategy? Allison (2012) argued it is a choice and that it can be cultivated in everyone through coaching and asking specific questions, such as:

- What is the best opportunity this situation could lead to?
- How can you show others this challenge will not get you down?
- What will you celebrate?
- How are your talents a plus in this situation?

Additionally, Allison (2012) listed the personal practices of highly resilient leaders, including:

- engaging in activities that rejuvenate

- being mindful of what and how you communicate
- perpetual optimism
- responding to criticism as an opportunity to improve practice
- building relationships with all stakeholders early on
- observing patterns to make smart decisions

Moreover, resilient school leaders manage to sustain in this highly demanding profession through their positive mindset and perseverance through challenges, while finding happiness from the meaningful work they do to improve student outcomes.

### **Social Support**

When it comes to theoretical perspectives and the health and well-being of novice school leaders, attention must be given to how social relationships influence our biology, cognition, behaviors, and emotions. The concept of social support has been depicted for centuries. Darwin denoted the benefits of being a social animal. Throughout human history, survival has depended on integration into a social group. Thus, the recognition that one was not accepted by the social group or that the social group would not come to one's rescue if needed was foreshadowed by certain death (Lahey & Cohen, 2000). Kort-Butler (2017) explained how the term Social Support Theory emerged from publications by Drennon-Gala (2010), drawing upon several theoretical traditions, around their work with delinquency and crime, making the argument that instrumental, informational, and emotional supports reduce the likelihood of delinquency and crime. This theoretical framework has been applied to various professions and contexts. The importance of social relationships and the contributions to health and well-being has been the focus of research by scientists and practitioners across a wide range of social, behavioral, and medical disciplines. According to Leahy-Warren (2014), social support is a theory that focuses

on relationships and the interactions within those relationships. Lakey and Cohen (2000), provided the three theoretical perspectives on social support research, delineating:

- (1) the stress and coping perspective, proposes that support contributes to health by protecting people from the adverse effects of stress, (2) the social constructionist perspective, proposes that support directly influences health by promoting self-esteem and self-regulation, regardless of the presence of stress, and (3) the relationship perspective, predicting that health effects of social support cannot be separated from relationship processes that often co-occur with support. (p. 29)

In grounding this theory for the purposes of school leadership induction, Chao et al. (1994) found socialization was the essential process that enabled organizational new members to learn about and adapt to new jobs and roles. As new leaders assimilate into their roles, they need to acquire the culture of their organization.

## **Reflection**

Critical Reflection Theory falls under the category of Adult Learning Theory. As with other Adult Learning Theories, mentoring is a means to assist learning and growth via reflection about practice (Ehrich et al., 2001). Origins of reflective process date back to ancient Buddhist teachings. John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget were some of the first to bring this concept into the realm of education. However, it was Schon's work in the 1980s that put Critical Reflection Theory on the map. According to Newman (1999), Schon was searching for a new epistemology that essentially provided a different way of thinking about knowledge, looking back at a situation and then reflecting how this impacts our practice, which he termed "knowing in-action, reflection-in, and -on action" (p. 146). Schon described reflective practice as a process that allows practitioners to make informed decisions.

Fast forward to the current understanding of Critical Reflection Theory and the language has changed, but the original concepts remain fluid. Little (2019) defined critical reflection as meta-cognition, self-awareness, and considering multiple viewpoints which in turn lead to reflective action (p. 1). Currently, reflective practices are considered a common exercise among educators. Critical Reflection Theory has been widely used for many years in mentoring and coaching new teachers in the United States and abroad. In a study incorporating novice teachers in Malta, Norway, and Ireland (Tonna et al., 2017), researchers found to varying degrees all teachers were exposed to reflective mentoring practices. The findings also indicated the importance of challenging hierarchical relationships and utilizing inquiry-oriented approaches as a means of eliciting genuine reflection from the mentee.

Many principals receive training as instructional leaders on how to use critical reflection practices as they coach their teachers. Yet critical reflection is less prevalent or structured in new school leader induction, despite the evidence regarding its utility. In an in-depth two-year case study conducted in the Midwest, with provisional licensed principals, findings concluded that guided reflection through reflective writing proved to be effective in preparing and retaining new leaders (Creasap et al., 2005).

### **Mentorships**

Mentorships are another viable stress management strategy. The origins of the term mentor, according to Panagiotakopoulos (2019), comes from Greek mythology. During the Trojan War, the king of Ithica, left his wife and his son to go and lead his army. He left his son under the care of a guardian named Mentor, to guide and protect him in his absence. Those words—guide and protect—seem relevant as we consider the modern term mentor. As Mitgang (2007) suggested, providing novices entering any field or profession with an experienced guide

dates back to ancient times and it has gained popularity across several disciplines, but has been implemented only relatively recently with regards to onboarding new principals. In fact, there has historically been a sink or swim mentality when it comes to new school leaders. Lashway's research (2003) established new administrators experience intense, unrelenting stress as they try to adjust their textbook understanding of leadership to the real world of practice (p. 87). This has changed dramatically, as a nation-wide development in principal mentoring has emerged since the 1990s and continues today.

This trend toward school districts establishing mentorships for new school leaders has been a direct result of the prevalence of turnover in new principals and a lack of quality candidates for principal roles. As Lashway (2003) denoted, superintendents report quality candidates for principal positions are dwindling, especially in rural areas and large cities. This nation-wide movement encompasses concerted efforts by universities and school districts to create high quality principal licensure and induction programs that include mentorships. Nonetheless, they still miss the mark. Far too often mentorships are constructed to address state standards or promote the districts' goals and are not centered on the individualized needs of the new leaders. As Mitgang (2007) described, the Wallace Foundation's research concluded many of the existing mentoring programs are falling short of their potential, all too often being a buddy system or check-list exercises that do not adequately prepare new school leaders. Most of the mentoring programs do not explicitly address the psychological challenges manifested by the stress in this role.

Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2016) unpacked the concept of creating a positive work structure, naming mentor and peer support as critical in the novice phase. Providing this framework, within a unique mentorship, allows for the mentee to observe, practice, debrief, and

live these strategies with an experienced practitioner. Brown et al. (2001) surveyed 98 new principals to examine the learning process during their initial years as principal. When asked which methods helped them the most, participants cited sharing experiences and problem solving with colleagues. Having a trusted colleague of whom to bounce ideas and who can push and/or challenge one's thinking is priceless, especially in the first years of the principalship. The benefits of having a mentor who is available to actively consult with on problems, goes beyond the actual surface level. Holloway (2004) indicated more specifically, this aspect of mentoring allows mentees to feel their concerns are validated; it fosters growth and stretches thinking, while decreasing feelings of isolation. Looking to the research on principal mentorship, as a model for new school leaders to thrive through relationships as a theoretical foundation, two key components emerged: coping successfully through adversity and participating in opportunities for growth and fulfillment. Parylo et al. (2012) completed a study to examine the principal mentorship, framed within the social constructivism paradigm. They interviewed 16 new principals to gather their perceptions on their recent mentorship experience. Through thematic analysis of the interview data, the mentees perceived mentoring as socialization and as support, along with professional development and reciprocal learning. The researchers established supportive mentoring relationships are essential to novice principals and an important path to principal effectiveness.

### **Knowledge Gaps and Constraints**

Although high-quality research on the topic of school administration and stress is extensive, extraordinarily little research exists on school administrators and compassion fatigue and the effects of that fatigue on their health and job performance. The same is true for research on administrators and Secondary Traumatic Stress. Research on examining the impact of

Secondary Traumatic Stress on school leaders remains minimal (Walker, 2019). In fact, Borotrager et al. (2012) suggested despite the importance of the studies already conducted, they are more suggestive than definitive. Signaling the urgency for extensive work to be done in this realm.

Additionally, more research needs to be done to fully comprehend the connection between principal well-being, and how it impacts the school, staff, and student outcomes. The Ontario Principal's Council (2017) describes this as a growing global crisis in school leader well-being that requires urgent policy and intervention, as it is impacting school-level outcomes for generations to come.

Despite all the literature indicating the benefits of social support, there is limited evidence about how and how well these interventions work (Hogan et al., 2002). This gap in the literature leaves many questions unanswered about the specific actions in social support that work best for coping with stressors, which could make the playbook for mentorships a bit nebulous for the mentor. Although there have been definitions and theoretical discussions regarding the concept of social support, the range of interpretation has resulted in a lack of comparability among the studies (Hupcey, 1998). Regarding critical reflection, Brookfield (2009) contended the challenge rests with the conflating of the terms, indicating the addition of the word critical automatically makes the reflection deeper or more profound.

### **Implications**

At the heart of every high functioning school is a strong leader. When leaders are under chronic stress and unwell, the impact on staff and students is massive. Since the 1970s, the antecedents and consequences of stress on school leadership have been studied. Among these studies, there is a high correlation with the prevalence of high levels of stress among school

leaders and specific stressors, including: the pressure to perform or intensification of the job due to increased accountability and responsibilities; compassion fatigue and Secondary Traumatic Stress; the challenges of negotiating a healthy work-life balance; and isolation. Clearly the well-being of school leaders is becoming a prominent issue on a global level that is impacting teaching and learning, as well as longevity in the profession.

Unfortunately, according to Bartoletti & Connelly (2013), our priorities have not yet caught up with the research as principal development remains a low priority in most educational policy agendas. Even those districts that are actively offering their new school leaders support, they are not typically meeting the needs of those immersed in this dynamic and arduous profession. Nor are most principal preparation programs teaching the coping strategies to deal with the stressors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century principalship. These challenges demand new solutions. This need is particularly crucial when it comes to onboarding new principals. The magnitude of the learning curve for new school leaders is all encompassing. When new school leaders are ill prepared for the challenges they will encounter, stress builds. Bayer (2016) describes how the attrition rate among novice principals is high due to the lack of support and proper preparation that lead to stress and burnout. Without possessing the proper coping strategies and supportive relationships, these challenges become more than they can handle.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD OF INQUIRY

### **Introduction**

The aim of this study was to elicit rich, in-depth descriptions of the participants' lived experiences through a series of focus groups interviews over several years. Using narrative analysis from a constructivist postmodern research paradigm, I sought to better understand the challenges new school leaders face that creates chronic stress that can lead to psychological and physical issues, as well as the structures and supports they need to remain in this demanding profession. In this chapter, I describe the methodology used to collect and analyze the data in this study.

### **Background, Setting, and Positionality**

There were 16 focus group interviews conducted during the Colorado State University (CSU) School Leadership Institute (SLI) weekend retreats from 2017-2019. A follow-up focus group interview was conducted during 2021. It was held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) process included an initial request and an additional modification request. See Appendices A-E regarding the IRB initial application process, modification request and approval, the researcher's IRB training certificate, and the researcher's note.

The SLI retreats were initially created to address the need to support new graduates of the CSU Principal Preparation program as they navigated the first years of their new school leadership roles. The retreats were held in a cabin nestled in the Rocky Mountains. Cell phone service and internet were spotty at best, forcing participants to disconnect from work and family responsibilities and to be fully present for the retreat. During these retreats, stories from the field

were shared with lots of laughter and sometimes tears. Affirmations abound as the leaders related to each other's experiences. All meals were enjoyed together. They also engaged in team building exercises, art-based activities, hikes with partners, reflective journaling, and book studies. All of the retreat attendees participated in the focus group interviews during each retreat.

As a veteran school administrator, I have understood chronic stress on a personal level. This study allowed me to look at this phenomenon on a larger scale. My positionality in this study is as a qualitative researcher who has been afforded the data from these focus groups. I believe my experience of going through principal licensure preparation and working as a school leader for many years has been advantageous for telling the story through the participants' voices. Postmodernism emphasizes the importance of understanding the researcher's context as part of the narrative. My leadership background is quite different from the participants of this group. My leadership experience includes being a principal of an independent American Indian Tribal School in Northern California for 10 years and a director of special education for an international school in South America for 4 years prior to the study. However, I am relatively new to leadership in the public-school arena, currently working at the district level in special education administration. The participants were novice leaders in public school settings. As I listened to the recordings and read the transcripts, I tended to toggle between reflecting on my first years as a principal, relating to the participants' experiences, and my current scenario as a district-level administrator.

Reflexivity is an attitude of attending systematically to the construction of knowledge during the research process, especially on behalf of the researcher (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Within the context of this study, my background and position are important considerations that provide a richer, more developed understanding of the complex role of school leader; however,

reflexivity also required me to examine and consciously acknowledge the assumptions and preconceptions I brought into the research that contributed to shaping the outcome. My relationship as the researcher, is a partnership in data generation. Being positioned in this manner, I found exercising reflexivity essential to this process.

### **Research Design**

My epistemological paradigm choice regarding this inquiry is situated in postmodernism, questioning the truth and reality of this phenomenon from the sources of knowledge— in this case, the actual lived experiences of new school leaders. From this postmodern perspective, I sought to break out from the previous studies on this topic and look critically at the underlying reasons for the prevalence of chronic stress and burnout among school leaders in the data set. The narrative interpretation is conducted within a postmodern constructivist frame in which knowledge is assembled, not unearthed. Meaningful qualitative work requires intricate interpretations of social phenomena. Narrative analysis is particularly well suited for this study, as I sought to understand what experiences the participants had in their school leadership roles that were causing stress and what they felt they needed to be successful in their professions. Humble & Radina (2019) make the distinction from her approach and those previous versions of Glaser and Strauss in the relationship between researcher and researched, the use of asking critical questions throughout inquiry and taking a deeply reflexive stance. This postmodern approach puts the voices of the study participants at the forefront of the story. Glesne (2011) refers to the sustained act of constructing, which includes “selecting a particular story to tell from the data you have analyzed and creating the literary form that you believe best conveys your story” (p. 218). To obtain a richer analysis of the data, I have utilized a methodology of

perspective taking in the qualitative research processes. Perspective taking is a crucial reflexive strategy in qualitative research. The following research questions guided this study:

Research question #1: What do school leaders identify as their sources of stress and how does that stress influence them psychologically and physically early in their administrative careers?

Research question #2: What coping strategies or stress management techniques do school leaders employ in order to stay healthy within this profession?

### **Participants**

The participants in this study included a convenience sample of nine school leaders who were all graduates from the same principal preparation program and were in their first three years of a new school leadership position. The participants were invited to participate in the retreats and gave written consent for the focus group interviews (see Appendix F). The retreats were free to participants and completely voluntary. The participants worked in five different school districts across Colorado. Five participants were men, and four participants were women. One female identified as a Latina. One male identified as Latino and White. The rest of the participants identified as White. The participants were from the pool of graduates from the prior three years who were currently in administrative positions. This selection of participants ensured representation across building levels: elementary school, middle school, high school, and district. The participant composition also ensured a variety of roles were represented: deans, assistant principals, principals, and a special education coordinator. All participants except one, had been teachers. One participant was previously a social worker. I developed a description of each participant, identifying some key characteristics as reported by each school leader. In a process described by Humble and Radina (2019) as Doucette's use of the listening guide process, I

reviewed the transcripts, attending to the diverse characteristics of each participant, and then created a narrative for each one. These descriptions represent the roles and status of participants during the first School Leadership Institute retreats. Pseudonyms are used to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

### **Leah**

Leah taught Spanish and English language development at the middle school level for over 10 years. She then moved to a dean position, a role typically responsible for discipline, attendance, and various student-related supports, and was in her second year as assistant principal in a middle school. She reportedly was (a) thriving and growing as a leader and happy in her current role; (b) part of a strong, cohesive team; and (c) eventually wanted a principal position.

### **Lily**

Lily worked as a social worker for seven years. She was dean for three years, and all of her experience was at the same high school. She reportedly was (a) part of a supportive team and (b) ready for a new challenge.

### **Jasmine**

Jasmine taught two years at the middle school level, taught five years at the elementary school level/special education, and spent 16 years in administration as principal and director. However, this was her first year in a public school district leadership role as a coordinator of special education. She reportedly would like to pursue work in higher education as professor/researcher.

**Andrea**

Andrea taught for 10 years at the middle school level and was in her second year as high school assistant principal. She was reportedly (a) extremely positive about her role/team, (b) growing as an administrator, and (c) did not talk about seeking her next role.

**Tyler**

Tyler taught five years at the elementary school level and was in his second year as assistant principal in the same school. He reportedly (a) experienced many shifts in the leadership/structure of his team, (b) did have support from district and building level, (c) had a role similar to a principal role but structured differently, and (d) did not talk about his next role.

**David**

David taught at the high school level for five years, spent one year as dean in an elementary school, and then spent the next year as assistant principal in same elementary school. David was in his first year as assistant principal in a high school. He reportedly (a) struggled and did not have a supportive team his first two years in leadership, (b) currently had great support on his team, (c) was growing as a leader, and (d) desired principalship in the near future.

**Ryan**

Ryan taught physical education for 20 years at the high school level. He was in his second year as a dean in a middle school. He reportedly (a) had struggled some with administrative team support, (b) was new to the school, and (c) would have liked to secure a high school assistant principal/athletic director role.

**Carter**

Carter taught middle school social studies for about five years, became assistant principal of a different middle school for one year, and then became principal at the same school; he was

in his second year in that role. Carter reportedly (a) felt he was meant for this role and was in his element, (b) was growing as a leader, (c) had supportive building-level and district-level teams, and (d) eventually wanted to seek a superintendent position.

### **Kyle**

Kyle taught science for 10 years and then went into a high school principal role. He was in his second year as principal. He reportedly (a) did not have administration-team support in the building, and (b) he was considering other opportunities and even desired to be a classroom teacher again.

### **Method of Data Collection**

The decision to utilize focus groups as the data collection vehicle for this study was determined based upon several factors. Interviews, focus groups, and observations are common forms of data collection among qualitative researchers. Focus groups have been advantageous due to their social structure. The use of focus groups dates back to the 1940s, with Robert Merton at Columbia University studying post World War II mass-media propaganda (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2014) described the related functions of focus groups as three-fold, inquiry, pedagogy, and political. By definition, focus groups are a way of collecting qualitative data among a small group of participants in an informal group discussion on a particular topic (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). In considering the size of the focus groups, a study by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) stated:

The rationale for this range of focus group size stems from the goal that the focus groups should include enough participants to yield diversity in information provided, yet they should not include too many participants because large groups can create an environment

where participants do not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and experiences. (p. 3)

Similarly, Agar and MacDonald (1995) described focus groups as a hybrid between a structured meeting and a spontaneous conversation where individuals pick up on one another's contributions. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) stated, "The progression and management of conversation is influenced by the knowledge, experiences, and discursive styles of each focus group participant and the moderator" (p. 15).

Focus groups offer high quality data to educational researchers. For example, in a study recently conducted, by the Learning Policy Institute (Levin et al., 2020), to dissect the principal turnover issue, seventeen principals participated in multiple focus groups that elicited thick, rich descriptions of their experiences and offered insights into why school leaders leave their positions. According to Levin et al. (2020), the data from Learning Policy Institute study demonstrated that the, focus groups allowed the researchers to identify several strategies that could give principals the supports they need to succeed and remain in their jobs: (1) high-quality professional learning opportunities, (2) support from strong administrative teams with adequate school-level resources, (3) competitive salaries, (4) appropriate decision-making authority within the school context, and (5) evaluations characterized by timely, formative feedback.

Researchers must consider the limitations of each methodology when deciding upon an approach. One challenge of focus groups is social desirability biases, the tendency of some respondents to report an answer in a way they deem to be more socially acceptable than how they truly feel or think. Also, with small participant sizes or samples, the data is less generalizable. As a researcher, I acknowledged these tradeoffs. Regardless, I was convinced focus groups were the best fit for this inquiry. The rationale for utilizing focus groups for this

study are multifaceted. Focus groups afford participants the environment in which they are more vulnerable and likely to answer questions deeply and authentically. Focus groups tend to be less threatening to many research participants (Kruger & Casey, 2000). Kruger & Casey (2000) suggested focus groups offer an inherently social environment. Within this highly social setting, participants are more likely to bond with other participants and in turn be more vulnerable and willing to share information that will yield important data. Focus groups can range from structured interviews to collective conversations. In this study, semi-structured questions were asked in hopes of breaking down walls and gathering the most data during the focus groups. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2014) describe this evolution, “They can and do develop a life of their own. The best focus groups are perhaps best thought of as eventually dissolving into the flux and flow of everyday human affairs” (p. 339). As the name suggests, the researcher has a strong influence on the focus of the conversation. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) described how the ongoing conversation is influenced by the knowledge and discursive styles of each participant and the moderator. I also appreciated the idea that participants may also benefit from giving their time to focus group research. As Powell and Single (1996) suggested, focus groups have potential therapeutic benefits as it may improve morale and generate feelings of self-worth among participants. A well-known example is Paulo Freire’s work in Brazil (1993) which illustrated the empowerment disenfranchised people experienced by having their thoughts, feelings, and stories heard through focus group participation, as depicted in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Overall, focus groups can generate valuable data to facilitate positive change in educational practices that might not otherwise be accessible from other research methods. Given all the advantages of enlisting focus groups, this was a strong method for collecting the data I needed to comprehensively answer my research questions.

Over the course of two years, from 2017-2019, the School Leadership Institute convened for four weekends at a professional retreat. These focus group interviews were conducted during the four weekend retreats. Trained facilitators, associated with the CSU Principal Preparation Program, conducted a total of 16 focus group interviews that were roughly one hour long. The follow-up focus group interviews, approved through the IRB modification, was conducted virtually in 2021, by one of the same trained facilitators. It lasted approximately ninety minutes. The participants were put into two focus groups: one with four participants and one with five. The focus groups in this study had a flexible structure that provided participants with the space to engage in reciprocal conversations. The focus group questions asked participants to identify supports they needed in their current role as well as ways to improve the principal preparation program. The interview questions asked, were as follows:

- 1) Now that we are two to three years into the job, what has changed and what remains the same?
- 2) What is your current understanding of the principalship?
- 3) I can't imagine doing my work without...?
- 4) Do you have a clear understanding now of what your purpose is?
- 5) What do you need?
- 6) What aspects of the retreat have you coming back?
- 7) What is the best piece of advice you think you've employed that a mentor has given you?
- 8) Now that you are a few more years into your position (5-6 years now), what has changed? Which stressors have stayed the same? What used to cause you stress that no longer causes stress? What new causes of stress have emerged?
- 9) Do you believe your job has impacted your mental and physical health?

- 10) Do you feel “pressure to perform” in your current role?
- 11) Has your job had an impact on your family? Describe. Give examples.
- 12) When you work with students and families experiencing trauma, how does that affect you?
- 13) Is isolation or loneliness something you experience in your role?
- 14) Are you able to obtain work-life balance? If yes, what are your strategies for accomplishing this? If not, do you think it is obtainable in your current role?
- 15) Do you reflect upon your work? What does that look like?
- 16) What relationships support you the most in this field? Please expand.
- 17) What do you consider important qualities in a mentor?
- 18) How do you manage stress?

All participants were asked the same questions. The facilitators ensured that each participant had the opportunity and time to answer each question. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) stated, “The progression and management of conversation is influenced by the knowledge, experiences, and discursive styles of each focus group participant and the moderator” (p. 15). The focus groups conducted during the retreats were recorded and the recordings were professionally transcribed by TranscribeMe!. The virtual focus group was recorded and transcribed via Otter.ai technology. I then reviewed the transcriptions for any discrepancies.

### **Data Analysis**

After all the focus group interviews were transcribed professionally, I submerged myself in the data. I listened to the audio recordings multiple times, creating memo entries as I listened. I read the transcripts repeatedly. In analyzing the qualitative data, the semi-structured question responses were grouped using content analysis, then coded to identify general themes and finally

placed into categories. I also looked at the data through several analytical lenses, including critical race theory; grounded theory; ethnographically; narrative analysis; and phenomenological. Finally landing on an ecological and ontological narrative approach to analyzing the new school leaders' narratives, using Doucet's Listening Guide method. Humble & Radina (2019) stated, "This approach utilizes four readings of the interview transcripts broadly framed as attending to (a) reflexivity, (b) narrative, (c) subjectivity, and (d) structuring contexts" (p. 81).

More specifically, in the first reading, I looked for repetitive words and phrases, central themes, events, and key characters. I noted the following repeated words and phrases: school, my team, making the right/wrong decision, not enough time, isolation, alone, culture, climate, trust, relationships, family, priorities, expectations, figuring it out, confidence, achievement, insecure, new, my purpose, gratitude, performance, fear, afraid, learning, comfortable, uncomfortable, leadership, principal, not being myself/true self, and being my true self. Next, I identified the central story line that encompasses a group of new school leaders who gather for a professional retreat, where they openly discuss challenges and triumphs, as a means to re-center on their purpose and reflect on their practice, in a safe, non-evaluative space. Then I recognized the themes of this story, which include emotional and psychological components of the work; stress; the importance of relationships (family, friends, administrative teams, teachers, and mentors); time constraints; work-life balance; feelings of inadequacy/insecurity; fear of failure; pressure; authenticity; and compassion fatigue. Then I went through the transcripts again, developing a case study story for all nine participants identifying key characteristics.

Afterwards, I utilized a reflexive strategy illustrated in Table 2. Table 2 illustrates respondents' words on one side and my reactions, interpretations, and wonderings laid out in the

adjacent column. This approach allowed me to see how my views affect the interpretation of the data.

**Table 1**

*Reader Response Reflexive Strategy (Partial Sample)*

<b>Participant Statement</b>	<b>Researcher's Interpretation</b>
...the fear of the unknown, that first year—not that there aren't new things all the time, but I pretty much know what's coming my way everyday even if it varies in degree of severity.	This confirms that this aspect was present in the fall transcripts—fear is a common emotion associated with the beginning of a new school leadership role.
So that first year, I think there was so much pressure on me to see the big picture right away.	Participants frequently refer to the pressure they were/are under in the first year.
But I think having this forum to talk about my purpose, and to revisit it is something I don't do day to day like reexamine why I'm doing it.	This retreat provides the space for these school leaders to reflect and reconnect with their purpose for getting in the field in the first place. This re-centering through focus groups seems to be therapeutic to the participants.

In the second reading, I created “I” Poems for each participant. Typing out each participant’s “I” statements. Completing this task allowed the analysis to focus on their words as a means to interpreting their words. This process helped refine some key themes in the data.

**Kyle's I Poem (partial sample)**

I think one unique challenge in a lot of cases is-- I guess my situation is not different than many.

Am I enough for what this community needs?

I would agree with you on that. Just all the learning and yet you're called upon to make the decisions and to not just sit back and watch.

I think I would add too, my experience and what I've been-- I've been doing some aptitude testing lately and the principalship never before do I have a better understanding of it as an administrative position.

So, I feel like I'm doing a lot of things and none of them as well as I could.

I kind of feel like I'm on the outside just bringing my knowledge to a community.

I think that there are some administrators who are called upon to come in and set up shop and set up camp for 20 years and really assimilate and just become that.

I'm nervous when you look at the national average of a principal.

I think I already do. I already have a lot more of a read of what to not step into, what is valued, what to not step into, what to not mess with, and then where the needs are that would be appreciated, and where my expertise would not be appreciated at this time and wait for that to develop over something.

In the third reading, relationships and relational subjectivities are examined. Humble & Radina (2019), acknowledge that Doucet's third reading approach is rooted in feminist theoretical insights on relational dimensions, social networks, and social support. Relationships are a reoccurring theme in the data and is a crucial component throughout the findings. In this third reading, I did rediscover the importance of family, and especially spousal support as it pertains to the new school leaders support network at home. I also saw how the importance of gaining the teachers' trust was frequently identified. The participants also emphasized the support network they have within their buildings and among each other.

In the fourth reading, socio-structures, ideologies, and theoretical themes are highlighted. This process led me to make particular sociological and structural arguments about the research participants. For example, one participant presents as an outlier or an exception in many ways throughout the data.

### **Trustworthiness**

I used several techniques to ensure credibility, transferability, and confirmability. To ensure credibility, I shared a draft copy of this paper for review with two participants of the focus group interviews, David and Andrea, as well as the two CSU professors responsible for the inception of this project. I asked them to tell me if the contents of the paper ring true from their perspective. Throughout the process, I met with a classmate every Sunday to discuss our interpretations of the data. This on-going process provided me with another person's examination of my thinking. This helped me understand what biases I was bringing to the data and confirmed my interpretations. According to Merriam (2019), transferability occurs when the findings can be applied in other contexts. I have incorporated thick rich descriptions of the data collection, the analysis process, and the findings. A literature review established similar findings in other studies. However, one consideration is the small sample size in this study. Some findings may not be generalizable and could be exclusive to this population of school leaders. The findings are elicited directly from the participant statements, establishing confirmability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Narrative research is by its very nature an ethically complex endeavor. As a researcher, I developed stories of challenges and triumphs as participants navigated the early years of their administrative careers. I wrote my account of each leader and subsequently interpreted the

narratives to shape them into my theorizing about new school leaders and the influence of stress on them as part of my research study. I am extremely sensitive to the responsibility I have in making sense of their experiences by imposing my interpretations on the stories told. Postmodernism recognizes that there may be many truths. Using narrative analysis, I have organized the focus group data into distinct subjects, as opposed to reporting just a sliver of each participant's story. I strove to strike a balance between portraying a contextualized story with adequate details that makes the participants real and relatable, while ensuring the participants' anonymity. In addition to using pseudonyms, I paid close attention to the possibility of deductive disclosure. Sim & Waterfield (2019) explain deductive disclosure happens when a reader puts together innocuous pieces of information to determine a participant's identity. They emphasize that the more detailed the data, the greater the likelihood of deductive disclosure. In addition to my ethical obligations as a researcher, I possess deep admiration and respect for my fellow participants in this study. As such, I hold a genuine concern for the study participants' well-being and have been cognizant of misrepresentation and anonymity throughout the research process.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this longitudinal study, nine school leaders within the first few years of their new administrative roles in Colorado, volunteered to share their experiences during 16 focus groups held during a non-evaluative professional retreat in the Rocky Mountains, established by their university's principal preparation professors in the hopes of learning what new leaders need in order to thrive and remain in this profession. The stories told during these focus groups provided detailed and personal accounts of their lived experiences as new school leaders. The novice leaders summarized their journeys as very stressful and difficult the first year, with many unforeseen challenges that they were not prepared to handle. They broke down the varied components of the pressure they were under, the isolative nature of this role, the challenge of finding a work-life balance, and the toll it has taken on their overall health. As time passed, these new leaders developed strong support systems and a variety of coping mechanisms and strategies that have enabled them to remain and grow in their positions.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the finding related to the main research questions:

- (1) What do school leaders identify as their sources of stress and how does that stress influence them psychologically and physically early in their administrative careers?
- (2) What coping strategies or stress management techniques do school leaders employ to stay healthy within this profession?

The findings are organized by the categories which developed over time, making meaning and creating a story of their tribulations and eventually their triumphs as new school leaders. Findings are organized by categories based upon the coding for their sources of stress and coping mechanisms or strategies. This organization method was a way to elevate each

person’s voice and reveal their personal insights. Table 2 establishes the frequently participants referred to a particular stressor and coping mechanism during the focus groups.

**Table 2**

*Coding of Stressors and Coping Mechanisms*

<b>Stressor/Coping Mechanism</b>	<b>References</b>
Stress due to taking on a new position	23
Stress due to work-related pressure	34
Stress due to changes in social dynamics after becoming an administrator	14
Stress due to work-life balance challenges	14
Health issues due to work-related stressors	21
Relationships as a support system	25
Developed coping mechanisms to combat work-related stress	31

Key categories in this study were developed from the focus group transcriptions, as themes emerged from this study through utilizing Doucette’s Listening Guide (Humble & Radina, 2019) to narrative analysis methodology. The first category established the participant’s baseline as they began their journey as novice school leaders, which was denoted as a baptism of fire in many regards. In the second category, findings related to the sources of stress that elicited feelings of pressure. The third category delved into the participants’ shifting social circle and their feelings of isolation. In the fourth category, the tightrope of work and home life is illuminated. The fifth category provided stories of the influence stress had on the participants’ overall health. The sixth category began to shift from sources of stress to sources of strength, as leaders described the crucial relationships they have formed. And finally, the seventh category illustrates the specific coping skills these school leaders have developed to survive and thrive in

their roles. Table 3 outlines the way in which the codes were organized from example codes to broader themes, and to categories.

**Table 3**

*Code, Themes, and Categories*

<b>Example Codes</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Category</b>
Lack of preparation, making sense of everything, first impressions, the unknown, being tested, frustration, insecurity, learning curve	Novice administrator development	Baptism by Fire
Inadequacy, fear of failure, not enough, upsetting others, run off, fired, leaving the profession, not enough time, workload, pressure from others, pressure from yourself, moral/ethical dilemmas	Beyond one's current capacity	Under Pressure
Isolation, loneliness, alone, waning social network, nobody takes care of me, nobody really gets it, fishbowl affect	Shifting your inner circle	One is the Loneliest Number
Guilt, not doing enough at work, not being home enough, strain on family	The challenge of finding work-life balance	Walk the Line
Fatigue, anxiety, worry, kids with trauma, lack of self care, losing yourself, stress, being unhealthy or a decline in health	Work influences on health	Everybody Hurts
Team, coach, mentor, accountability, thought partner, non-evaluative, support, trust/respect, symbiotic, reflection, feedback, community	Components of critical relationships	Stand by Me
Confidence with experience, clear boundaries, compartmentalizing, avoiding, perspective, reconnecting/recentering with one's purpose, self reflection, letting go, being callused, being numb	Developed coping strategies	I Will Survive

### **Category 1: Baptism of Fire**

After the principal preparation program was completed, participants were eager to land their first school leadership positions. That excitement continued through the interview process. Once they landed the job, the excitement became swirled with many new emotions, including, apprehension, insecurity, and feeling overwhelmed. Regardless of how comprehensive a principal preparation program is, nothing can prepare a new school leader for everything coming their way during the first year. Throughout the data, participants reflect on their first year as an administrator, indicating it was very difficult. The first year, for every participant, was the hardest. There was some cross-over among participants who named similar challenges, including insecurity, proving themselves, and huge learning curves. Each participant described their challenges in detail during the focus groups.

David described how the first year was difficult because he didn't have a sense of the big picture and he did not have buy in from his staff:

So that first year, I think there was so much pressure on me to see the big picture right away. And truthfully for me that's impossible. Let me stumble through a calendar year and just see the timeline of things and my responsibilities to see that big picture. I think it takes a year to understand your building, the people, and the culture. And that year is hard because you're trying to make these big decisions and problem solve and you don't have a full understanding of your surroundings. But that first year is just a struggle to learn and you feel uncomfortable making decisions because you don't know the impact it will make with some people. A big thing that's helped me this year that I didn't have last year was just buy-in from my staff. That they know me and trust me, and they respect me to a level where they're just comfortable with my decisions and my PD and they know

we're heading in the right direction. And when you don't have that yet because you're still working on that because you're so new, it's hard. It's hard with your confidence. You're over-analyzing everything that you're doing because nobody is coming up to you and saying, "Hey, that was great," or "Thank you for that. It means a lot to me." So just that relationship and buy-in from staff, not everybody, but those little comments keep you going in the right direction. And that's something you don't get right away.

Leah also spoke about lacking confidence and fear of making wrong decisions her first year. She also found it challenging to build trust and gain respect from the teachers. Additionally, Leah was frustrated with not having all the answers her first year as Assistant Principal. She explains what has changed since her first year:

I think what has changed, I would say just relationships with people in the building. So, there is a level of trust I feel among people I work with that wasn't there before and I feel like it's reciprocated, so just by even the conversations people seek meet out for or advice or, "Hey, will you come into my classroom?". I definitely just think there's more of an awareness that I don't need to know everything...that it's okay to be confident and say, "I don't know right now." I was very frustrated last year. So, I do feel like I have gotten a bit of myself back. But maybe what I'm saying the similarity is that in year two, there's sort of still a level of frustration of who is this making me to be. You start to get used—you have to, out of survival. You can't just stay in anxiety land for so long but in order to get used to it, you have to almost sell a part of your soul or give up some of those things just to be able to cope.

Tyler also, lacked confidence and second guessed his decisions during his first year in leadership. He also felt he had taken on too many responsibilities as a means of proving himself

to others. This in turn piled on more work than he could complete effectively, and it extended his workday. Tyler found himself bringing work (literal and mental/emotional baggage) home often that first year, which impacted his homelife. He describes his experience:

I was a bit more analytical because I was afraid if I made the wrong decision then that's going to be on me for a while...last year, I would make decisions and I would second guess them so much it was like I was spending more time thinking about my decision than just making a decision. And then you carry it home, and then you tell your wife about it, and it's kind of impacting your night.... last year was so much venting. Last year, I was too hungry and tried to take on too much...I would do things at like 75% efficiency level and I didn't like that because I usually like to do it hundred percent, get it double checked, everything else. And so last year, if anyone ever needed something, I'd always volunteer for it and I'd always regret it after because I'm like "that means I'm going to be here until six o' clock at night and I'm going to have to do all this other stuff!"

Jasmine shared that the learning curve of content knowledge was her biggest challenge in the first year of her new administrative role. After 16 years of being out of public education, Jasmine talked about her struggle to learn special education law:

I would often need do my research, going to the CDE (Colorado Department of Education) website. Revisiting IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and case law...it changes all of the time. So, brushing up a lot that first year was time consuming.

Ryan's challenges during his first year in school leadership were centered around understanding what systems are working and where the gaps exist. He also discussed the lack of training he received for his role as dean. He stated:

In my first year, I was at a new school level in a new building. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what was working, what I didn't think was working, but what was working, those types of things. There was zero training in this particular role. The training is kind of by fire.

Kyle, like others, describes the steep learning curve that first year. He compares the stark difference he noted from being a classroom teacher to being a principal. He also articulated the pressure he felt to prove himself as the new principal as he sought to build trust with the teachers. This developed into insecurity and anxiety, to the point during which he considered leaving the profession. He shares his thoughts during the focus groups:

You're dropped into a community...of staff who've worked together for a long time, families, parents, and you don't know the backdrop. You don't know much of the history so you are scrambling to learn a lot of that so you can respond appropriately to the needs and desires of the community and you're only bringing your perspective. Wherever you go, there you are. All you have to bring is yourself and so you constantly are questioning is this what this community needs? Just all the learning and yet you're called upon to make the decisions and not just sit back and watch. So, it feels like you are shooting in the dark and flailing around. The word administrator seems to stick out to me for what it actually is ...and that means it's a very surface-level position. I don't feel like I get to go deep on anything. Because as a classroom teacher, you get to develop your deep relationships with kids over time, and you have deep relationships with your content and

your projects, with the direction you're heading. Your focus is so much narrower, and you can just do that really well. So, I feel like I am doing a lot of things and none of them well as I could. I had an immense amount of anxiety the first year to make sure that first impression was so accurate or something because I—not that I'm not trying that now, but you could just tell that that's what everybody was asking, was, "Who is this guy? What's he going to do? What is his agenda?" and I really tried hard to do that well. I think I discovered that what I pushed against last year so much was how the job was changing my personality, how it was asking so much of who I wasn't. Most of the time I'm like, "I just can't do this anymore, I'm not wired for this job or whatever...". Maybe I'll quit. Maybe they'll fire me because I can't do it all.

Andrea spoke to her first year as a time in which she was really getting her feet planted on the ground at first, but then once she was comfortable, she wrestled with how she will put what she learned in principal preparation into action in real time. She described her first year as an assistant principal:

I think last year stuff was kind of kicked to the side. I knew it was still there, but I was in survival. Everything was reacting and figuring out who's who and who's going—who can you trust and all of that. Now that comfort comes in...and I wonder how am I going to make change or how am I going to lead.

Similarly, Carter described his first year as a time of realization as he transitioned from theoretical learning to practical application. He also denoted that holding people accountable the first year was out of his comfort zone. Carter reflected on his first year:

When I first came in, that preferred future, that vision was super clear to me and then the learning curve for me right way was oh, you can't just have a vision then it happens. And

you can't just articulate it really well and have lots of rationale and then people will go, "okay." It doesn't happen. For me, now it's more about having to push a little harder on staff and things I wouldn't do the first couple of years...and that's hard. It's not my nature. And so, I think the first couple of years, knowing I had to learn how to do that, but not doing it was hard. And it's just a different kind of work.

Lily described her transition from the first year as more comfortable and experience has given her a voice that she didn't possess initially. Lily shared:

I would say there is definitely a level of comfort that has continued to grow over the last couple of years.... I think especially in the first year and mostly the second year, there was an element of like, I don't have the background with this job in order to say this given opinion on how something's working or that maybe that isn't working the right way that we're doing things.

In summary, participants in this study were able to reflect upon their first year in their current role as a school leader during the focus groups, sharing their individual experiences and the sources of their stress. Many common themes resonated, including, intense learning curves, insecurities, and the emotions that accompanied those elements during their first year. All participants were stretched, and it forced them to evolve and grow quickly. While one participant's first year stood out as extremely difficult and it pushed him to the point of considering leaving the profession all together.

### **Category 2: Under Pressure**

Throughout the focus groups, one of the most frequently used words was *pressure*. These new school leaders described in detail what the pressure felt like for them in their lived experiences, as new school leaders. The participants' pressure came from a variety of sources,

including workload, ethical dilemmas, self-imposed pressure to be effective, fear of failure/losing their job, and feelings of inadequacy.

According to multiple studies (Wells, 2013; West et al., 2014), the workload of administrators is one of the most prevalent reasons for the mounting pressure in this profession. Carter, David, Tyler, and Leah all explained how the workload was putting insurmountable pressure on them.

Carter discusses how his workload is not obtainable and he must prioritize what is most important, which means other things just don't get done. This clearly is a compromise he has had to make in his current role. Carter stated:

Well, it's an overwhelming amount of—the workload as compared to the hours of day even if you worked 12 hours a day every day or whatever, you want to do more. It's an immeasurably more, so then there's a lot of picking and choosing.

David described how his intense workload is keeping him from his purpose:

.... calm this parent down or making sure I—just do my job in regard to what's expected of me from my boss's point of view and the district point of view. Leading those big change efforts takes a lot of time and commitment, and it takes away from what I need to do day to day. So as hard as it is to navigate, where do I put my time and priority.

Because I personally know where I should go, but there is so much other stuff to do to just get through the day and get done and be able to go home.... I need to call these 5 parents...I need to talk to these 10 kids.... I need to do these 21 evaluations; I need to fill out these referrals.... there is so much paperwork and process, and it's limiting me from my purpose. When I walk from my office to the main office, I could literally go on three different tangents. There are probably kids vaping in this bathroom. Do I go in there?

There's a kid skipping class right here, there's a kid crying outside of this door, what battles am I picking up along the way just to turn in some paperwork to the main office ...but I want to make those connections with kids, so I find myself going down those rabbit holes so much.

Tyler struggled to juggle all his responsibilities. He also thought his workload was unrealistic and given what he has seen thus far in his role he did not see his workload getting lighter in the foreseeable future. In fact, Tyler feared, in time his workload would continue to grow. During the focus group Tyler clearly articulated his current unattainable workload and he foreshadows his concerns about the increasing demands in the profession:

I would say as a first year that there's not enough hours in the day to get everything done that we need to get done. I think, for me, it's just been a constant almost—like we were talking about last night, this constant climb where you might see over the ledge a little bit but then you just get piled on again. And so, my understanding of the first year is just that it's never going to get easier. And I think just with the way that the education system is shifting, that our jobs will never get easier. If anything, it's going to get harder, and our responsibilities are going to get more and more—almost important. That's my understanding of where I am at now is surviving but a little afraid of the direction that I see things going in, even at the district-level.

Leah had a hard time early on due to her desire to do everything effectively. As an ambitious new leader, she found herself under pressure to complete all of her tasks with quality, given her heavy workload. Like David, she described how her purpose or big picture is impacted by her workload. She briefly described her experience:

It's like the big picture. I think that's right. Like seeing the forest through the trees kind of like, oh my gosh, I have deadlines that I have to---I can't extend. I have all these evaluations to get done by when and oh I need to get into classrooms, and I need to make sure that my teachers feel supported and that I'm modeling and I'm inspiring.

Two participants described the pressure they were under as related to the moral or ethical dilemmas they faced in their administrative roles. They discuss how they are making serious decisions that yield high impact on students, teachers, and families. Andrea described the role she plays as the point person for Safe 2 Tell, Colorado's mechanism for anonymously reporting and helping someone who is struggling or hurting, and the pressure she felt in that position:

...and then I think of the safety issues. With our school and Safe 2 Tell, I get all the Safe 2 Tell calls and those come to my phone at 2:00 in the morning. And I think probably once or twice a week I'm on my phone with dispatch giving them information...because they need us...and were the ones making those calls, then officers are going to the homes and then they are letting us know. So even that safety piece of., it's outside of school—even if it happens outside of school, it comes directly to us. And so, it just—the effects and the waves of every decision you make and what it's held to, it has to be almost perfect in the eyes of some people.

Lilly described the parts of her job, that require ethical decisions to be made and the pressure felt as she deals with ethical dilemmas:

...and what feels probably more out of the job description is the adult piece with teachers dealing with personal issues that are not even related to school, but it impacts everything that they do in the building. And HR-related issues, yeah, social media, communication, that kind of stuff that isn't in a book or a class, you can't relate to until you're doing it.

Sometimes we are harder on ourselves than anyone else is. A few participants shared how they felt a lot of pressure from themselves to improve, grow, and operate highly effectively as new school leaders. This was particularly prevalent as these school leaders were in the second, third, or fourth year of their leadership role. As they described this pressure it became apparent that this was a significant source of their stress.

Andrea reported feeling this pressure and urgency to do more and take steps to reach the disenfranchised populations in her school that were not getting what they needed. She shared:

I've found this year, is I have a new level of—that's changed, is I just feel a new level of pressure that I'm putting on myself to do something. Our building needs some changes, and I want to be part of pushing that. And I just have this new level of...I'm not doing enough. I don't know where it's come from.... but I just feel a pressure this year that I didn't feel last year, because it was my first year on the job. I'm getting a pulse of the place, seeing where we're at, what's going on. And where this year I'm like, we've got — this is a problem. We need to do something. And wanting to get it done, and not being necessarily the one in charge. There's just a different level of pressure, and then me not wanting to stay status quo, right? ...I mean, to the point I've pulled the data. I've looked at our data. I see where our gaps are. I knew where they were, but I wanted the data to back it up. Now I'm ready. ...like our subpopulations and the way, we reach out is definitely detrimental...now we have a lot of those lower-income families. We have to serve those populations...because it's there. The deficit is there.

As Carter finished his fourth year as principal, he started to question why there hasn't been more progress under his direction. He feels this pressure or stress because he did not

consider himself new to this role any longer and perceives that there should be more progress in his building. He analyzed this pressure to perform:

Well, I was thinking about some of the new stressors. I think about like, I think about PLC (Professional Learning Community) implementation and how that has been kind of the core of our instructional work, and I look at the timeline sometimes, the stress is like, oh shoot like we should be further along by now and like, that was never, you know like when you're the new principal there's all these *while I'm getting started kind of feelings* and now I start to think like, I mean....some of this stuff should be done by now and if it's not, what is the problem...me? Is there a cultural issue that I haven't worked through? ...like what's preventing our progress because I've hired over half of the staff by now. So, like what you know, and I think that because it becomes a new stressor for me is thinking about like what are the things...that I am not questioning that are not new that I need to be doing differently, because I know how to do these things right...I've been doing it a certain way, and it's not working. So, what's the problem...

Lilly described her pressure to perform as three-fold. She feels she need to move to a different role, after being in a dean role for some time. There seems to be internal pressure to grow professionally. She said, "I guess the biggest stressor, more this year than last year, has been figuring out what's next and pros and cons, to be thinking about different avenues."

Lily also described the pressure she feels on her administration team. Being a former social worker, her team often relies on her to be the calm in the storm or the even-headed person under pressure to handle the difficult situations. However, always keeping her emotions tucked away puts a lot of pressure on Lily. She described it like this:

...and I'm like, the people describe me as the person who's called in chaos. So, I have to look like I have my shit together. I can't...I'm not going to say like, I'm really struggling, I need some help, I need to process this.... because that's vulnerable, like that requires a level of openness and vulnerability that, I think, as in society, but especially like school leaders, they want to be seen as the opposite of that.

Lily did eventually move on to an assistant principal role and within that role, there were new responsibilities that she felt ill-equipped to manage. She described the self-imposed pressure to be effective at these new tasks:

I found out next year I'm taking on, like, building maintenance as an area to supervise and that has, like I have stressed about that for the last three weeks and will continue to stress about it. It's not like many APs (assistant principals) have a background in construction like that...it's just an area that I have no idea what to do with that...what that entails and so I'm like that alone is my biggest stressor going into next year...like somebody comes and tells me their window doesn't open...do I just go and find the custodian...stuff like that goes through my head all the time...what I'm not going to be good at...because I have no idea how to do it.... so that's self-imposed...100% and something I need to work on.

Novice school leaders have high expectations to lead important change in their new roles. However, once the time comes to step up and make the difficult decisions to initiate the necessary change, fear of failing at this endeavor can set in. This was the case with two participants in this study. Andrea explains how this excitement and momentum turned to fear when it came time to step up:

Well, it's just—when you said that it made me think about the true fears of now. Last year I don't think I had many fears other than I don't want to mess up. Where this year when I think of that pressure, I think it brings me back to the fears I have of when I take this on and when I go, if it fails, what does it look like? All of those pieces have started to resurface. So the true fear of when I do my job, what I'm scared of is failing. It's the fear I think I felt during the program (principal licensure). How am I going to make change? or How am I going to lead? And all of those which is back to your purpose of why you do this stuff. Right? And so I think last year that stuff was kind of kicked to the side.

Tyler also spoke to his fear of failing as it pertains to making changes that could result in a decrease in student achievement and ultimately losing his job:

That's like...what you're saying, one of my fears, right? Talking about the average life of an assistant principal or principal in a building and you come in, and you learn what to do, what not to do, where to help, where not to help. And then something happens and test scores go down or something like that, and then they bring in someone else, and you feel like right when you're figuring it out and you know the community and the school, something happens and just—I don't know. I look at the statistics.... then that's the fear is what happens in that third, fourth, fifth year that forces or requires a principal or assistant principal to leave?

During the first few years of being a school administrator, feelings of inadequacy can surface. Kyle, Andrea, and Leah shared these emotions during the focus groups. Andrea clearly felt she lacked the skills to take the leap from the classroom to leadership:

In regard to coaching...but I do think it's needed in your first year. I mean, me coming directly from a classroom into now, I'm evaluating twenty-two people. And I've got to be

able to coach them in the way they need to be coached because everybody is different. I don't know that I'm prepared for that. So those are things that stress me out—I don't know that I'm giving them what they need. Because sometimes I don't have the answer. Leah described a conversation she recently had with her long-term mentor, where he called out her insecurity and gave her some guidance:

I'm not a confident person. I always think the worst. Like, "it's not good or that's not—I'm just—that's where I go." So, he always says, "You need to just believe in what you do and move forward. And trust yourself."

In response to an inquiry about his current understanding of the principalship, Kyle described his experience in his first year as a principal, sharing his feelings of inadequacy:

You're hired into this community of staff who've worked together for a long time...families, parents, and you don't know any of that backdrop. You don't have much of the history and you're scrambling to learn a lot of that so you can respond appropriately to the needs and desires of the community that you've been placed in and yet you're only bringing your own perspective. It's the saying "Wherever you go, there you are." All you have to bring is yourself and so you constantly are questioning is this what this community needs, this decision? Am I enough for what this community needs?

### **Category 3: One is the Loneliest Number**

Lashway's (2003) study concluded that the major sources of stress among novice principals included the wide variety of responsibilities; feelings of inadequacy; the unforgiving pace; the task of supervising teachers; the need to master technical skills; and most of all, the sense of isolation in their new role. To that point, participants in this study frequently described feelings of isolation. Isolation can take many forms.

Ryan described his feelings of isolation:

So, if you're coming to me looking for a certain answer, I don't know that I have it but I will try. We'll figure this out. And you do. You start to feel like I am the only one—which is a crazy feeling and I know that's been a battle in education for a long time-- is how do we eliminate the isolation that exists in a school building that's filled with so many people but yet everybody will say at some point, "I just feel so alone. I just feel isolated. So, I think sometimes you have to be able to step away from it to really be able to focus on it.

David explained how he felt all by himself without a mentor his first year as an assistant principal and how he was forced to learn through trial and error.

I'm in a situation where I didn't really have a mentor truthfully. I wasn't assigned one. My principal and I at first didn't really speak the same language which made this so valuable to me because I see you guys as mentors. So, this has just been great to have that mentorship when sometimes school districts, you don't have one in your building, you're not assigned one and you're kind of---I had to learn everything kind of by myself just by failing and learning.

Kyle described how isolating it was to not have a team to confide in:

Yeah, I mean I don't want to dwell on it, but super jealous just listening to you talk the other day about that. That's exactly what I want so bad. So I just don't really have a team....and to just have a confidential place where I could be real with somebody because I don't have that in my team at all. My superintendent is super supportive...but I still feel pretty isolated. And I'm kind of on my own, and I'm a little like, maybe I need to be at a bigger school where there is a team.

Tyler suggested the loneliness he feels is due to the fact that nobody can relate or understand his experience:

But when you don't get those for a while, you kind of find yourself like, I just want one person to recognize how hard my job is. I just want one person recognize like, "Damn, your day is busy". "You don't take a break." "You can't even eat your lunch."

Carter expressed how his social circle has dwindled and how he shares very little about work with his friends and family now. He also described how professionally he takes care of everyone, but nobody takes care of him. These situations lead to chronic feelings of isolation:

That's a great question. I think there's a natural move, I don't know how natural it is I guess but that expected move of like I had a big social network. And I just don't have that anymore.... there's teachers and I'm not a teacher and then just over time it just kind of erodes, so I've got a small social group now, and I don't love that but it's still okay. I was thinking the other day, I know this is like a little self-pity moment but I was thinking like, I don't really, like there's like nobody—nobody in my world that would like take care of me at any point, like "Hey, you just sit down and let me, like I don't ever have those...like I'm always taking care of everybody else all the time and I know that's just like a common thing for a grown-ass person, but like I definitely, I find that to be a struggle like come from taking care of people all day at work, to then, like I don't feel taken care of by my supervisors, the way I feel like I'm taking care of teachers and kids. So, I'm not sure what to make of that thought. Who are the caregivers for our caregivers...?

Principals often describe their role as very public and *on 24/7*. Two of the participants in this study describe how they felt pressure from being under the microscope and judged by others. Andrea shares her thoughts on this fishbowl affect:

I think another thing I was thinking of is just the degree it—I guess, the standard at which you're held for every face you make, for every word you say. You have to be so careful of how that is perceived.

Leah described an incident where she worried about how something so benign as stopping to get breakfast on her way to work might have looked in the public eye:

I was grabbing a bagel at like 7:00 on my way to work...and I felt guilty for even stopping, then I saw him and I'm like great, I saw someone.

#### **Category 4: Walk the Line**

One of the most prevalent challenges facing school leaders is obtaining a healthy work-life balance. This is especially true during the first years in the profession. It takes time to figure out the life hacks necessary to juggle work and family. During the focus groups, most of the participants named this as an on-going struggle during the beginning of their administrative career, however it is one of the most prominent issues to have resolved as time moves forward in this study. The participants shared their personal experiences walking this delicate line.

Tyler describes how he was taking on too much at work and what the implications of this were on him:

...Your hands are just on everything, and after we lost our executive director, I had to have my hands on finance and budget and contracts. So, I was doing almost everything, and it was just—it was paying a toll on me and this year I had to be much more

intentional. I would bring all this home with me and it would impact my evening with my wife.

Kyle made definitive statements about balance being a necessity to keep him in the profession:

But all that gets more to the idea of balance which is this elusive thing that we're always trying to chase in our family, in our home life, and everything. And the world is not going to encourage balance. It's going to continue your—it's going to continue to try to make us specialists or to focus on an agenda for this organization or this person or this and that. And so I think it is something you have to pursue. So I feel like if I can have balance around what I know that I'm good at and passionate about that feeds me, that I can do the things that are the other 40% or 50% that's really hard. But if I can't achieve that because the system or because of the team or because of the whatever, then I will not stay in the profession.

David described how he felt he had to choose between prioritizing work or his children and by choosing his children, he suffered with guilt:

Something I'm battling just morally is having two little kids at home, and I have never—this sounds bad—but I have never worked less because I'm close, now, to home. And I get to—first of all, I go to work right at eight because I drop off the kids, and that's awesome. And I always was a teacher—at my last job, I was there way before everybody else. So, I'm getting there right at eight, and I leaving pretty quick after teachers leave. There are still teachers there when I leave because I want to get home. I got a newborn, and I got a two-year old. And I'm in a position where I can make the most change if I really spent more time there, tell you the truth. I could. I could put together some

initiatives. I could be that voice. I could lead dynamic change if I put the time into it. But morally, I'd rather put that time with my family right now, and will that change and fluctuate over the years? Absolutely, but I feel a little—I've been thinking about that a lot. I'm in a position of power where I can make change, but I'm not investing that time into it right now. That goes to my family right now and being okay with that is—I'm just struggling with that. I almost feel guilty.

Similarly, Andrea tells her struggle with balancing work as an administrator and being a mom to a young child:

I think my stressor and the one thing I couldn't do the job without kind of go together in a way. For me, it's the balance of my family, and I know that feeds me so I can do my job, but then also feeling like I'm doing enough at my job at the same time. So that piece of, you know, if I need to go home and just cut everything off and be with family, it's good for me. But then, I stress out about doing that because what could I have done in that time that could have pushed things forward? So, it kind of goes hand in hand in a way. And if I really think about it, that is probably the biggest stressor for me is if I stay a week—like we had testing week, I was there constantly. I was stressed because my kid was at daycare ten hours a day. I'm like, I don't want my child spending ten hours away from me. I mean, I'm his mom, right? And then if I don't do that and do the opposite, then I'm like, now my job, am I doing enough towards getting things done? And doing it—it's hard for me. And I think other people handle it better, but for me, that's probably the biggest stressor—either way I go, I feel I've given one up for the other.

Ryan shed light on the changes he has seen in his role as a husband and father since becoming a school leader:

I have always been the one that was the support person. I was the listener. I was the one that provided time with the kids. You got a meeting...I got it all. Get them to that event. And now that's disappearing. Because of a lack of self-care, I'm not the good listener that I was. I'm not being able to provide that support that I have in the past. And it is creating challenges in the family dynamics and trying to figure that out.

Carter shared how his work as a school administrator has taken a toll on his family:

...as a teacher I just had more margins in life—and so sometimes yeah I feel like a lack of margins makes me like, I want to come home with my best self –I don't always.

Sometimes I come home with just pieces of what's left...I don't feel like I have anything left in the tank to do what I really should do.

#### **Category Five: Everybody Hurts**

As discussed at length in the literature review, chronic stress can manifest into physical and mental health issues. Participants spoke of specific stressors that had a direct influence on their health and wellness. The following examples demonstrate how the stress of school leadership has taken its toll on this group of novice administrators.

Carter expressed the struggles he's had, including compassion fatigue, a lack of self-care, and responses to negative interactions, that have led to a decline in his health throughout this data collection period:

Like what it is right now that stresses me out and keeps me awake at night? And it's kids in crisis. It's kids who are having a bad experience at school, it's kids who can't come to school because of anxiety or the fight and the bullying and all that stuff. And then I was walking it backwards and like that's been my year three stressor. But it's those kids in crisis. Now, I know you can't always help them. They always move, right? Like

wherever you get them kind of stable—then they move. They go somewhere. My God, nobody knows them there. They're going to slip through the crack. So it's progressed. My stressor has progressed over the years. Like a student today had to leave early to go to a court hearing to find out if he was going back to his dad or staying in foster care...as he walked out of our office, we both just broke down and I think there's that element of like feeling like our job is to make sure there's equity for every kid, and feeling the immense weight of really knowing so much about these kids and their background.... I don't know what to do with the information I have about trauma.

I was thinking, when you're sitting in the preflight instructions that the flight attendants—they talk about always put the mask on yourself first, right? And if I'm flying by myself, absolutely.... but then as leaders, we have to ask ourselves like, how many people can we equip with their masks before—like how long can we really neglect our own before we are going to fall apart? And I think that's—I think we just have to believe that we're supposed to—you know, leaders eat last. So that was a book that we went through when I first started and it's like yeah. But leaders got to eat at some point too. Like at some point, we have to take care of ourselves. That balance is hard, right? Yeah.

I think about it a lot, not because I think about leaving the profession, but because people always say to me like, "I don't know how you guys put up with all this BS. I hear it several times a day, without exaggeration. But so I think about it in terms of—there's got to be other ways to make a living that are not this emotionally, psychologically damaging. There's got to be roles where you don't take so much stuff from people.

I'm tired, I'm just tired all the time. I definitely was in better physical health and physical shape as a teacher.

...I sometimes just want to tell people like you should just be nice to us like you don't have to agree with us or like us or any of us...we can just be nice, like could you be nice. It's so exhausting, like I had to talk to a staff member today who just like laid into me and the whole hallway in front of a bunch of other teachers because they were upset about not being invited to something.... a ceremony—yeah that's a fatigue of like the way people talk to you sometimes.

Physical, yes, that's getting better, but the mental, my coping mechanism is just pouring into others all day long, just pouring into everybody else all day long....and I don't think about it, just in a moment- crash, fall apart, drink too much...not like bad...but just drink more often than I would and just zone out, have nothing left.

Like Carter, Andrea discussed how students experiencing trauma impact her in the form of compassion fatigue:

That's the stress. I think, though, one thing that I—it's not a stress, but it's the heavy heart kids. You hear their stories, and the teacher is super frustrated, for example, with a kid and you're like, "If you only knew." And there's some parts you shouldn't tell or can't tell the parents don't want you to tell. I think that—it might not be stress, but it's a different kind of—just lays on your shoulders at night.

David described his physical decline since taking on a leadership role by stating, "I love going for runs, but that just doesn't happen. So physical health is the worst it's been in a long time."

Ryan provided his thoughts on self-care going from teaching to administration, as well as how the culture in his school did not value self-care:

I think about that idea of self-care, I think I'm realizing for the first time in being in the world of education that I need to be more proactive in self-care. I've never really had to do that. Part of it was because I was in a teaching role as a PE teacher, where I was pretty active—and now that's not the case...so I'm finding that I do need to be more proactive in my self-care. It doesn't just happen naturally. So I would say in my particular position—again it goes back to some of the culture of the school—there is guilt for not taking care of school if self-care is needed—there is a lot of guilt that is put in place from all the way down to that three-hour para position. If that person is not at work, why? All the way to the assistant principal needing to be at a meeting that is required, why are you not here at work? And so the thought of taking a day off, it took a lot—it probably took me two months to work up the courage.

Lily narrated her story about work-related chronic stress and her health:

I had some medical stuff going on and had some tests and scopes and biopsies and the whole thing came back as stress. And my cortisol levels maxed off the charts. Yeah. The nerdy GI doctor was like, “Do you internalize things?” Yeah, I was like, “Do you want to be my therapist for a minute?” So, he made me create a stress reduction plan which was pretty interesting to do.

### **Category Six: Stand by Me**

The significance of relationships, for this group of school leaders, was clearly delineated throughout the focus groups. The need for a strong, supportive, coherent team resonated with all participants. Mentors and coaches were also referred to frequently as part of their support system.

Tyler illustrated how crucial his partnership is with his assistant principal, noting how difficult it was while she was on maternity leave when she stated, “She’s the left to my right. We’re polar opposites of each other but I have been struggling without her there. And so I can’t do this job without her there.”

Leah echoed this sentiment as she described the dynamics of her administrative team:

I can’t imagine the hard days not being able to laugh or knowing that if I don’t know what to do, I can just walk into any of their offices or those conversations we’re having all day. I just think –I couldn’t work anywhere else unless I had a really fantastic team there. Our team, we’re super tight, we have same philosophies, we laugh a lot. When we get angry we shut the door and get angry but we get each other’s back. We enjoy each other outside of school. So I think all those things make this job easy and doable.

Andrea shared the importance of the playful interactions and social aspect of her team, as well as how they support one another fluidly:

I think within the job, I’m such a—a need to have social and people person. And that’s just my personality...it feels great. We’re on a group text. We text each other at night, but we’re doing the GIFs and the memes that are about what happened that day...because it’s crazy and we have to get through it. You’re in it together. You’re just so supported in every decision you make. The principal called me about two parent calls she received about something that happened...and they’re really upset. She’s like, “do you want to take this one? You’re really good with this stuff”—and then a really tough parent called yesterday...and she was like, “This one I can handle because I know that she needs me. So it’s just that feeling of, you’re not alone. And you have people.

Andrea also stated in addition to her team within her building, she saw a need for a coach outside of her workplace:

But for me, I know my principal's been there but I think I would have benefited or still would benefit from—I'm thinking about a feedback piece of someone from the outside. So yes—I could use a coach--I can reflect on conversations and not feel like, oh if I said something wrong, should I tell her it started this way? --is there a way we could create that? Especially within that first year.

Ryan also reflected upon the need for a mentor or coach that is outside of the school district:

When I'm sitting in another middle school's media center having a meeting, do I really want to bring up the fact that I had these 10 problems in our building today? Is this a safe place to bring that up? And so being able to somehow create a safe space to be able to share within those vulnerable moments because that's where we have the opportunity to grow and learn.

David frequently discussed the importance of varying relationships he relies on in his administrative role. He discussed going out of his way to show teachers' support and in turn he earns their trust and respect:

I think you have to do some of the little things that maybe it's not your job to do sometimes in order to get those little comments from teachers. Have you found that when you do that, you hear from teachers, "I know you're not supposed to do that but thank you." And then you find yourself doing it more?

David also discussed how he appreciates the support he has within the SLI group:

And it can't be just one more thing that I have to go and do. It has to be meaningful. I don't have to spend money for it. Not that I need to get paid. There's going to be a dinner. I get to meet with some people, have a drink, and just talk about what I'm going through. Awesome. Where I think what makes this scenario here for us somewhat unique is yes, there are some guiding factors to it but much of our conversation is very organic because it's what we need. I need to bring this topic up because I need to be able to talk about this and it kind of naturally develops into some professional development.

David went on to describe how small gestures by his mentor make a big impact emotionally, building his self-esteem:

When I was trying to figure out what to do for next year, I was in between two job opportunities, so I met with her. I reached out to her. I just needed to talk to somebody that has an outside point of view who has been through this to kind of center myself. And that conversation, that half-hour we spent grabbing breakfast at Wild Boar really helped me to make the best decision for myself. So that mentorship. I still have that letter she wrote to me. It's actually in my binder. I could see it every day if I wanted to and it's a reminder of those tiny things, the text message, the breakfast, the handwritten note. And sometimes that's all we need. It's all we need in our darkest times is just one person to say, "You're there. You're doing a great job. Don't forget that. Don't lose your focus."

A little further into his career, David cited the need for coaching over mentorship by stating, "I don't need that direct mentorship the same way I used to. I need coaching, I need the facilitating and the questions. But yeah, it's changed."

Along those same lines, Carter shared how his needs have changed, as he had been in his position for several years, from mentor to a non-evaluative peer to be a thought partner:

I did so more when I first started. Now I play that role for more people and I don't have one or two that are my own, but they are supervisors so that is not the same. I miss having somebody who's just smart and maybe they don't, maybe they're not way more experienced but they're smart and in the same world, then we can bounce things off each other. You know, I think COVID played into some of that because there was a lot more networking, where mentoring sort of mutual mentoring would happen.

Kyle shared how crucial his mentor has been during the difficult times he experienced his first year as a school leader:

So I think that relationship's just really special and it happens over time. But just going back, I got a text after my old boss came and visited with me, which I told you guys about last night, after a pretty rough spell. And he hung out with me a couple hours and he says, "It was nice to visit. You have a good thing going there with some forward-thinking leadership supporting you." So that was the first sentence. And really I was—that advice to look outside of my problems and to look around and see how good I had it was powerful. Nobody else could've said that to me and I would've taken it with as much gravity and weight—because of who he is. He says, "There may have been sometimes this year when you wanted to change jobs because it's difficult changing a school. Then after your school begins to reflect your leadership, you may want to change jobs because you like to see to see the changes within your school implemented elsewhere." Which is kind of where he's coming from. Kind of sharing that I'm farther down the road than you think right now, just wait a few years, you'll be thinking it again but in a totally different way. But he says, "What keeps us in the game is remembering that ultimately comes down to changing people's lives, most importantly, the students' lives. And that is

something you did as a teacher and will continue to do as a principal.” So giving that advice but then also reminding you that you’ve already done that and that you can keep doing it. I think the power of a mentor is sharing that experience and reminding that younger person of where they’ve been, who they are, what they can be. That gave me a lot of fuel for a lot of days. Just that one text.

Lily described her perspectives on mentor/mentee relationships:

I think for me, it’s probably personality based but I, I really appreciate I think that two people come to mind when I think about mentors. I need people who-- ask good questions. In order to kind of get me to share and who check in randomly like that’s been really helpful. I will reach out but it’s when somebody is just like hey, how are you doing. It’s such a good point of just stopping and thinking and in knowing that like just like a simple question that can be so powerful and just feels so meaningful. So I think thoughtful questions would maybe be my number one thing, in addition to developing—a personal connection is important.

### **Category Seven: I Will Survive**

One of the most prevalent themes in the data collected from the focus group conversations was the progression or growth in the school leaders. As time moved forward, the participants would share how they were utilizing coping mechanisms, like setting healthy boundaries and being mindful of the seasonal ebb and flow in schools to manage the job-related stressors. Additionally, confidence in their abilities grew with time. Relationships within their building strengthened. Some participants found reconnecting with their purpose, or the reason they got into the profession in the first place, as a means of recentering and managing stress. Although the participants did not use the exact term cognitive appraisal, they denoted

compartmentalizing, letting go, or being numb and callused, as a means to minimalizing or mitigating the stressors they encountered. David expressed the leap he made from year one to year two:

I think it takes a year to understand your building, and the people, and the culture. And that year is really hard because you're trying to make these big decisions and problem solve and you don't have full understanding of your surroundings. Now that I'm in my second year, I have a full understanding of your surroundings...now I feel more comfortable, and I can get more done because I know so much more. But that first year is just a struggle to learn and you feel uncomfortable making decisions because you don't know the impact it will make with some people. But now I feel like I'm rocking and rolling more. There's still not enough time but I'm busier because I know more as well. So I think it takes a good year or year and a half to understand where you are before you can have a bigger impact.

David then described the trust and respect, he had cultivated from the teachers in his building, over time:

A big thing that has helped me this year that I didn't have last year was just buy-in from my staff. That they know me and they trust me and they respect me to a level where they're just comfortable with my decisions and my PD and they know they we're heading in the right direction. And when you don't have that yet because you're still working on that because you're so new, it's hard. It's hard with your confidence.

David explained how the exercise of consciously recentering with his purpose is helping him progress as a leader:

I'm there to use my skills and personality to make better humans, and that will always hopefully stay the same, stay at the center. But I think having this forum to talk about my purpose, and to revisit it is something I don't do day to day like reexamine why I'm doing it. It's hard when you're dealing with irrational and irate parents, and then all the upper-level systemic things that is hard to change. Why do I come to work every day? Why do I keep doing this? And this retreat or whatever we call it gives me the opportunity to focus. Like David, Kyle found being in touch with his purpose an important component of his growth as a school leader. He used a metaphor to explain it:

I think we're like gardeners and we're in the business of growing people, if I were to boil it down to my purpose. And I often will tell kids, especially when they're in trouble or whatever, "My job is to help you become the best version of yourself." That's the main thing right then but in the end, the big picture is to grow the best beets, and the best carrots, and the best---and each type requires a little bit of something different. And so I think even in the classroom, I think I have the same purpose but it was more focused just on those kids. And now when you have adults too—and I want to help that person become the best version of themselves—and by default then their students will benefit. And so if I was to boil it down and think if I were to hold onto that vision on a daily basis, it would help a lot because—yeah. You're a cultivator. I think we forget in the moments when we have to just focus on one of the things, we forget about the bigger picture of what we're doing. A gardener in a downpour, you're just trying to cover the things so they don't get trashed by hail or whatever and just keep them alive. And in that moment, you forget a lot of other stuff out of necessity. It can be kind of a downer. But I

think if we remembered our bigger purpose on a day to day, hour by hour basis, I think it would help handle a lot of the smaller things.

Kyle also described how he started getting comfortable with his stress level, or his new normal, in order to cope:

You start to get used—you have to, out of survival. You just can't stay in anxiety land for so long but in order to get used to it, you have to almost sell part of your soul or give up some of those things just to be able to cope. So I don't think I'm there...but I'm closer than I was last year. —my desk is a disaster and I'm not usually like that but it's just being able to —having to sort of be numb to, “All right. Well, I'm going home now. Maybe tomorrow.” And I hate that feeling but I'm getting more and more used to it, I guess, and maybe that's growth.

Leah shared how she viewed her purpose at the center of everything she did:

So if that's one of the biggest parts of the job, simultaneously, I think it's actually carrying out the purpose. I think a principal really has to have a vision for what the school is working towards and everything that they're doing. Whether it's conversations with teachers, parents, kids, the PD that you're looking into, the—anything.

Leah also described how—with time—she became more comfortable with conflict and realizes you cannot please all the people, all the time:

So I even think about things this year that we put in motion last year, but it's moving in such a positive direction. And there's evidence to support it. And now, there's—from a smaller group, very small group, but with loud voices of discontent and not happy. But I keep thinking—that was my fear, right? Just having people that I work with that don't see eye-to-eye and want to make it an unpleasant place to work and having to battle every

day versus let's join arms and work together kind of thing. But I'm more okay with it now because I see that 95% of our staff is moving in the right direction and working hard, still disagreeing because we need to....and realized, this isn't—I mean, I'll take it because that's probably my role, and I'll eat this shit sandwich when I need to. But it's not—this is not about me. It's about the work that we're doing. So I think I've gotten more okay with that.

Leah also expressed how she came to accept how difficult the school leadership role was and therefore needed to afford herself some grace:

What hasn't changed is just how hard it is. But I'm more at peace with it I think. To me, it's like it's hard because it's a hard job and some days will be easier and some days, I'll feel like I know more and that it just ebbs and flows. I think I've become more okay with that, knowing that there's days I'm going to go home where I'm like, I don't know what I accomplished today, and I don't know what I did, but I can get better tomorrow. So I just feel like I have peace with that.

Lily was another participant who conveyed she had developed confidence with more experience in her leadership position:

I would say that there's definitely a level of comfort that has continued to grow over the last couple of years. And I think that especially in the first year and then mostly in the second year, there's this element of like, I don't have the background with this job in order to say this given opinion on how something's working or that maybe this isn't the right way that we're doing things. And now, there is that comfort level with saying, "Look, I've done this. This is my third year doing this, and it's not working."

Lily also explained how, with time and experience, she learned to compartmentalize her secondary traumatic stress as a way of coping:

We've had these semi student tragedies since this summer started. And it's strange how it bothers me for a day or two of emotional toll, while your kind of doing the work, it seems, and then it's really easy to you know, put it in a box in a different part of your brain and I think that's just a way of multitasking. As a member of the crisis team we don't do a good job of following up---schools are an interesting place—we spend so much time there and we interact with the same people for so long. And yet we don't really talk about things that in depth, like things are pretty surface level and I think it's a safety mechanism for us like we don't want to go down that path—I could process things more on my own and that would probably be helpful. But it goes back to--it's just kind of easy to talk about it for a few minutes and then move on to whatever is in front of you.

Another example of how Lily developed coping strategies as an administrator involved setting boundaries by saying “no:”

So how do you manage stress...by avoiding it. But I think like one of the things that has been helpful, which is learning to say no, like learning that I don't have to be at every meeting I'm invited to, like things can function really well without me. Saying no has been a big thing for me.

As Andrea had more experience in her leadership role, she was also determined to set clear boundaries. She indicated, “And it's so true. It's okay because when you say no it means you are saying yes somewhere else that matters.”

Likewise, Tyler shared how he reflected on the previous year and began to say no to intentionally focus on priorities:

So this year, I've been much more intentional on what I get involved in and what I do take on—I've had to tell people no, and they kind of look at me like, you're the dud that will everything, and I've had to say, I've had to take that back to do the things that I should be doing right instead of trying to take on so much and then I felt like I was letting people down because I was trying to do something nice but I wasn't doing the best job I could with it.

Tyler also discussed how keeping his purpose, positively impacting students, at the forefront helped him feel energized:

My good days, my productive days as a leader were way more beneficial to me and rewarding than my best days as a teacher. And I felt that because my great days as a teacher I was impacting 25 kids, but my great days as a leader I impacted my entire school. Yeah, the job sucks at times. It's more challenging, but what those good days give you is so much more rewarding to me than the great days as a teacher.

Carter was able to reflect after several years in his current principalship and share how he has grown in a variety of ways as a leader: (1) setting healthy boundaries, (2) finding a balance, (3) prioritizing, and (4) accepting the seasons of chaos in schools:

I will tell you even just two-three weeks ago, somebody said we're really struggling to find a common meeting time and somebody said like 7am would be a good time for meeting, and I suggest that is definitely possible but that is, that's gonna violate a boundary for me. Like that is too early, and we have a group that likes to meet at like 7pm ...that's not appropriate to have a regular meeting at that time so it takes some boundaries. I have my kids half time. So that's the days I get the heck out of here—the days I don't have them I work a lot so that dynamic has been fantastic. I don't work on

weekends-- I won't do it. I don't do the late-night thing. There's a time where I just shut off so I don't work when my kids are around in the evenings...I just put in really long days during the workweek. Part of it is the perspective of knowing it's temporary, and that everything is seasonal, so like this week—and that August lead up to school starting again it's just insane. And then it's okay again so I think part of it is just the perspective of the experience of the cyclical nature of working in a school and being able to just kind of breathe your way through the tough stuff.

Carter also referred to the term callused as a developed and necessary coping strategy, given all the secondary traumatic stress school leaders experience:

I'm a little scared of how quick I can move on from some of those things now.... but we have a former student who was just here two years ago, murdered by another former student, like in the last three weeks this happened, and it was really, really hard as a kid I spent a lot of time with. And then it just was—a little bit of callus that I felt, and it feels kind of gross, but I do feel like the pace of this job and the amount of trauma we see kind of creates those calluses.

### **Conclusion**

The data collected from the semi-structured focus groups that span several years in the lives of these novice school leaders illuminated their specific challenges and triumphs. Their vulnerability during these discussions allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth insight into their lived experiences. Although each leader has their own unique story, common themes emerged. The first year was by far the hardest due to the steep learning curve and their lack of confidence as they found their way in a new environment. Specific stressors were explored in detail with the most prevalent being pressure, the tension between work and family commitments, isolation, and

the impact on their health. Despite these challenges, all of the participants were able to name support systems and multiple coping strategies that they had developed over the years of this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Introduction**

This study aimed to identify the sources of stress new school leaders encounter that influence their health and wellness, as well as the strategies used to manage the stress in their leadership roles. Semi-structured focus groups were utilized to elicit thick, rich descriptions of participants' experiences. The extensive data sets were collected over several years. Narrative analysis of the participants' responses provided findings on the stress they experienced, including being ill-prepared for the position, fear of failure or insecurity, pressure to perform, isolation, unattainable work-life balance, time constraints, and compassion fatigue. They also cited that chronic workplace stress was impacting their health and wellbeing. Additionally, these leaders described ways in which they have learned to cope, remain, and thrive in their roles.

This dissertation is structured in five chapters with Chapter One being the introduction. In Chapter Two, the literature review, I examined research on the impact chronic stress has on health, multiple existing studies on stress and school administration, exploring specific stressors including pressure to perform, compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress, work life balance, and isolation, as well as stress management strategies—such as metacognitive approaches, social support, reflection, mentorships, and self-care. In Chapter Three I explained, the method of inquiry, the participants, setting, plan of inquiry, method of data analysis, trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethical considerations regarding the study. Chapter Four contained findings from the longitudinal data collection and analysis. In this culminating chapter, the findings are discussed and situated within implications for future practice in preparing and

onboarding new school leaders, limitations of these proposals are explained, and recommendations for future research are provided.

As explicitly discussed in the literature review, stress among new school leaders is contributing to turnover. Researchers argue school leaders are the second biggest influence on student outcomes (Day et al., 2008). According to Levin et al. (2020), the Learning Policy Institute identified five essential reasons for principal exodus, including inadequate preparation and professional development, poor working conditions, insufficient salaries, lack of decision-making authority, and ineffective accountability policies (p. 3). The stress levels in schools can manifest as physical and psychological conditions in principals (Sorenson, 2007). When the demands outweigh the skills and coping mechanisms, leaders are at risk for burnout and leaving the profession. According to a national survey conducted in 2017, approximately 18 percent of principals had left their positions (Levin et al., 2020). School principals are essential to enhancing teachers' practice as well as motivating faculty, which in turn creates a positive school climate. Levin et al. (2020) suggested building these conditions takes time and a consistent strong leader. When schools experience frequent turnover in leadership, there are lower gains in student achievement. Therefore, stress among school leaders is a serious problem afflicting the K-12 school system, requiring attention and resolution.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

#### **The Struggle is Real**

In the data collected for this study, multiple themes emerged. In alignment with narrative analysis, what stands out to me is the shared experiences in the stories the participants told. I will describe what I surmised as the essential components of the data set.

The first year was by far the most challenging. All the participants described the intensity and challenges they faced in their first year as school leaders. They shared how they were not prepared for the demands of the job and that the learning curve was extremely steep. This led to feelings of insecurity, and they struggled with making decisions due to a lack of confidence. They also felt they were being tested or needed to prove themselves before they could build trust and relationships with the teachers in their buildings. Many expressed the struggle they had their first year because they did not have the big picture in mind yet.

Pressure to perform at highly effective levels created a great deal of stress for the participants. Participants shared that they were under incredible pressure, both externally and internally. The most common examples included pressure as: 1) not having enough time to meet the demands of the job, 2) fear of failing or being fired, and 3) being faced with moral and ethical dilemmas. While others explained the pressure of being held accountable or judged for every word they said or every expression they made, as teachers tested them in the beginning. Internal pressure was described as the emotions associated with not doing enough or not being further along in their practice or towards their goals.

Isolation was another huge component to their adjustment as school leaders. They talked specifically about how their social dynamics shifted as they came into their new leadership roles. They shared feelings of isolation that were derived from a variety of situations. They no longer were friends with teachers. They discussed their waning social network. Some participants felt alone and didn't have others to relate to in their buildings. Participants shared how they experienced the fishbowl affect with all eyes on them and how they felt they were "on" 24 hours a day and seven days a week. Additionally, feelings of loneliness were derived from the fact they

take care of and recognize others all day long, but nobody takes care of them or acknowledges how hard their jobs are.

Work-life balance was a struggle, especially in the early stages of their leadership careers. This dichotomy of their professional lives and their personal lives caused feeling of guilt. Participants stated they felt guilty for choosing work over family. When they chose family over work, they had trouble being present and enjoying themselves because they felt guilty for not working. This tug of war put a strain on their families and their psyche.

Health was compromised. Many of the participants identified how the chronic workplace stress was affecting their health. Participants shared a variety of different health-related issues they experienced. The most referenced were fatigue, loss of sleep, anxiety (or worry), gaining weight, lack of exercise, and being stressed. One participant actually described her medical condition that was diagnosed as being a direct result of workplace stress. Many participants described how working with students with trauma was causing them to feel unwell and exhausted.

### **Becoming Resilient Leaders**

As the study continued and the new leaders spent more time in their roles, new themes began to emerge. The leaders were more solution-oriented, and they were able to name what was keeping them in the profession. The leaders were also able to state some specific stress management techniques. While others did not explicitly state the coping strategies, they did share examples of how they had morphed as leaders and were on a healthier trajectory. Participants in this study did not find the subsequent years as school leaders to be easy by any stretch, but they demonstrated that with the proper support systems and coping mechanisms, they were able to be healthier and thrive in their roles.

Relationships were everything. The most prevalent of the themes were centered around their invaluable relationships with their teammates, mentors, and coaches. They clearly depicted the crucial components of these relationships. Repeatedly, they described the need for their supportive relationships to not be evaluative in nature. In other words, the relationships they valued the most were ones where they were comfortable enough to share their reality, their struggles, and their emotions with, free from judgement or evaluation.

They shared having teammates—such as other administrators in their building—was especially important. The teammates were valued as thought partners and they held one another accountable. Teammates were also viewed as an embedded support system. The focus group interviews were highly valued among the leaders in this study. They found sharing their experiences and processing emotions out loud was cathartic. Mentors were deemed to be crucial to supporting the learning curve in the beginning. Mentors and coaches were named as vital to their on-going growth through constructive feedback and facilitated self-reflection. The professors in their principal preparation program were frequently mentioned as they served as mentors and confidants for years after they graduated. Every participant described their essential support system.

Self-reflection was named as an important component to their growth and ability to manage their stressors. Frequently they mentioned the importance of finding opportunities to reconnect with their purpose—to remind themselves why they had pursued this profession in the first place. The participants shared changes, that had developed over time, in how they interacted with the stressors they had identified earlier in the study. Participants also described the need to reflect or process with others. Having thought partners and those who could push on their thinking was critical to their growth as leaders.

Confidence and experience were a game changer. As leaders became more experienced, confident, and self-reliant they developed coping strategies to minimize the impact of stressors through metacognitive approaches. Participants provided examples of how they avoid certain stressors or let things go, that would have bothered them before. One participant gave an example of how she anticipated the naysayers who do not like change but knew it wasn't personal, whereas dissonance a few years earlier would have bothered her because she wanted everyone to like her.

Response to stressors is something that morphed significantly for some of the leaders over time. They also described how they compartmentalized some of the secondary trauma they experienced, out of necessity. During one of the first focus group sessions, one principal in the study described how students with challenging home lives kept him awake at night. However, years later during a focus group, he described how two former students with whom he had spent a lot of time had gotten into an altercation and one murdered the other. He mentioned how he was impacted, but only for a short period of time and that bothered him a great deal. He said he felt he had become callused. Others stated how they have become numb, or they put it in a box and move on to what's in front of them when it comes to dealing with particular stressors as a means to survive.

Setting healthy boundaries and prioritizing their time were two imperative changes they had made over time. In this study, the school leaders frequently reflected on how they had taken on too much during their first years as leaders. In later focus groups, these administrators described precise methods for achieving work-life balance. Each school leader described their unique strategies. Some described how they delegate tasks out to others. Some talked about their clear boundaries as far as how late they stayed at work or their routines that allowed for some

assemblance of balance between work and family. They also discussed the need to keep their goals in the center of their focus and to say no to other tasks or requests.

### **Implications for Practice**

The status of the leaders in this study is important to consider. All nine of the participants are still in school leadership roles. In fact, two of the deans are now assistant principals and two of the assistant principals are now principals. Why had this group of school leaders defied the statistics? I think there are several factors that could explain this groups trajectory as school leaders. However, some significant factors include the ongoing support they received early in their careers, focused upon wellbeing, relationships, and reflection through their principal preparation program and the School Leadership Institute Retreats. One could argue there are some things that cannot be taught and simply come with experience in school leadership roles. With proper preparation and support the impact does not have to be this extensive.

As identified in the literature review and in the data derived from this study, chronic stress is identified as one of the most prevalent problems facing new school leaders. In looking through the lens of Stress and Copy Theory, Critical Reflection Theory, and Social Support Theory, I name a comprehensive mentoring approach for new school leaders to obtain the tools and relationships they need at the onset of their careers. I believe teaching and modeling of stress management coping strategies within non-evaluative mentor relationships would help new school leaders decrease the intensity and time as they struggle early in their careers. Making important changes in how school leaders are onboarded could also decrease the number of leaders exiting the profession. Comprehensive mentorship would provide leaders with an in-depth understanding of the different ways of coping with the day-to-day stressors of their role. Comprehensive, meaning a holistic approach to onboarding new school leaders that focuses on

the whole person. This would require new leaders to learn a variety of coping mechanisms, self-care strategies, establishing healthy boundaries, cultivating resilience, creating a positive work structure, and obtaining emotional self-regulation.

The relationship between the mentor and mentee is essential to all aspects of the mentoring. Having a relationship that is non-evaluative, trusting, and comfortable allows for optimal growth to take place. When mentees feel secure sharing their emotions and mentors demonstrate empathy and guidance, this organically builds self-confidence and self-esteem in the mentee. Lipton and Wellman (2003) claimed when engaged in mentoring relationships, novices are more likely to increase efficacy as instructional problem-solvers and decision-makers through their collaboration. Being a new school leader is difficult and having an outlet—like a mentor—to share one’s feelings is key to coping with the stress. Confirming this notion, the participants in this study shared how the focus groups themselves were cathartic in nature and were centered conversations with trusted colleagues that provided a much-needed emotional release. Further, a comprehensive mentor program ensures mentees could learn a variety of coping strategies is one effective solution that can ameliorate the problem of chronic stress among new school leaders.

In a proactive and comprehensive mentorship, social support and reflection are synonymous. In a substantial study, Ehrich et al. (2001) examined a database of over 300 pieces of empirical research in mentoring to identify the range of theoretical standpoints to underscore the mentoring phenomenon, to devise a model, and close the divide between theory and practice in mentoring. One important finding of their study was the prevalence of reflection as a key component in several of the theories identified in mentor studies. The researchers also found numerous studies which looked at the social underpinnings of mentoring. There are several

functional aspects of these theoretical frameworks. Several scholars have considered mentorship an important component to on-boarding new school leaders (Collins, 1983; Creasap, Peters, & Uline, 2005; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2001; Halloway, 2004). Effective mentorships occur when mentors and mentees develop trust and engage authentically with one another. Being mentored by a knowledgeable practitioner can help guide reflective practice by creating a safe space to discuss challenges that arise in real time. This type of discourse helps to gauge the new leaders' thinking and challenge perspectives (Gray, 2016). Additionally, Gray suggested as new leaders are more contemplative, they can discern how they arrived at certain decisions and the effects those decisions had on the community. In this conceptual model for an alternative mentorship, mentors would build the mentee's reflective practice via storytelling, discussions, reciprocal questioning, modeling, observation, and journaling. As previously discussed, all the adaptive coping strategies suggested required some degree of reflection or meta-cognition, sometimes preemptively and at other times, after the fact, to grow and morph as a leader.

This type of reflective loop also provides emotional security to the mentee (Lipton & Wellman, 2003). Social Support Theory lends itself to fostering this interpersonal comfort. In a review of existing literature, social support is believed to be a universally valuable resource that has stress buffering effects (Taylor et al., 2007). In fact, presence of support has been repeatedly linked to health benefits, such as lower blood pressure and better immune systems (Hogan et al., 2002). Given the stress levels new principals encounter, antecedent strategies for wellness, like supportive relationships, need to be an integral part of mentorships. As such, Feeney and Collins (2014) stated close and caring relationships are undeniably linked to health and well-being at all stages in the lifespan (p. 113). With relationships at the heart of mentoring, mutual respect and

trust will ensue, and ideally this will allow the mentee to be vulnerable and develop the skills needed to thrive in their role.

### **Transforming Theory into Practical Application**

Participants in this study referenced how their health, emotional well-being, and personal lives were negatively impacted by the stress they were under at work. Two administrators in the study were seriously considering leaving the profession all together. Eventually, participants were able to share their ways of navigating their stressors as they developed into resilient leaders. Currently, many school districts are flailing as they onboard new school leaders using mentors as a buddy system or a person responsible for going over a checklist of responsibilities. To mitigate or decrease the level of stress new administrators face, I proposed a very different approach to mentoring, offering a holistic and comprehensive mentorship. Additionally, university principal preparation programs are pivotal to the foundational learning and building support systems with their students.

### **Recommendations for School Districts' Administrator Induction Programs**

- Carefully select mentors with requisite experience that are not in evaluative roles.
- Provide explicit training for mentors on all the various stress management techniques.
- Establish clear expectations for the mentoring experience.
- Conduct thorough interviews and administer surveys with mentors and mentees to determine best matches, giving voice and choice to the mentees.
- Pair mentor/mentee thoughtfully, considering alike roles, skill sets, needs, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, ideology, race, culture, gender, personality, power balance, and personal preferences.

- Mentors will teach, model, and promote specific coping strategies (appraisal-focused, problem-focused, & emotion-focused).
- Mentors will teach, model, and promote the importance of self-care (physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual).
- Mentors will teach, model, and promote all tenants of resiliency (optimism, celebration, strength-based, growth mindset, mindfulness, relational, observational).
- Mentors will teach, model, and promote reflective practices (looking back on situations/decisions and considering all pathways, recentering on their purpose for being in the profession, and identifying goals/progress).
- Teach, model, and promote healthy work-life balance (setting clear boundaries, prioritizing your time, and establishing positive work structures).
- Require frequent check-ins (at least weekly) regarding mentees stress levels and individualized needs.
- Mentors should foster social support by providing mentees with opportunities to socialize outside of the building, communicate frequently, help with challenges, be visible and viable (available as needed), and make a personal connection.
- Provide retreats where peer mentoring can happen organically.

### **Recommendations for University Preparation Programs**

- Dedicate time to discuss the stressors they will encounter in new leadership roles, so they can anticipate these challenges ahead of time.
- Teach the impact stress has on humans physically and psychologically.
- Unpack a variety of stress management techniques (self-care, resiliency, reflection, healthy work-life balance, coping strategies, and social support).

- Cultivate connections, among students in their cohorts, to establish friendships beyond the preparation program.
- Professors to provide guidance and mentorship in the two years following the completion of the preparation program.
- Create structured opportunities for cohorts to reconnect after graduation, to reflect on their practice, to relate to each other's experiences, and to establish a strong social support system.
- Establish opportunities for graduates to participate in focus group interviews.

### **Limitations To These Solutions**

#### **Mentorships, Critical Reflection Theory, and Social Support Theory**

The absence of data on this model poses questions about the efficacy of this approach. What does this alternative mentorship look like in practice? How open will school districts and partnering university principal preparation programs be to this paradigm shift? To truly establish comprehensive mentoring as a solution to this problem, it must be grounded in theory. Ehrich et al. (2001) stated one of the issues with mentoring is the lack of grounding in appropriate theory. Ehrich et al. (2001) examined a database of over 300 pieces of empirical research in mentoring to identify the range of theoretical standpoints to underscore the mentoring phenomenon, to devise a model, and close the divide between theory and practice in mentoring. They found only 15% of the studies identified a theoretical perspective.

Considering Critical Reflection Theory, little clarification is given regarding the difference between reflection and critical reflection. Brookfield (2009) contended the challenge rests with the conflating of the terms, indicating adding the word critical automatically makes the reflection deeper or more profound. Another criticism of Critical Reflection Theory considers the

ideology within each of us (Brookfield, 2009). In other words, the reflections are subjective, and the quality of the reflections or analysis is limited by the mentee and mentor's capabilities. These concerns aside, another deterrent is the amount of extensive training that would be required not only for the wellness components of this unique mentorship, but also for properly facilitating the critical reflection aspects. Districts would need to be willing to provide explicit professional development and invest a great deal of money for this type of endeavor. The last drawback about Critical Reflection Theory is it does not address the relational aspect of mentoring. Trust is foundational to the mentor and mentee relationship. Mentees need to be willing to be vulnerable when reflecting about their practice, insecurities, and areas of growth.

Despite all the literature indicating the benefits of social support, there is limited evidence about how and how well these interventions work (Hogan et al., 2002). This gap in the literature left many questions unanswered about the specific actions in social support that work best for coping with stressors, which in turn could make the playbook for mentorships a bit nebulous for the mentor. Although there have been definitions and theoretical discussions regarding the concept of social support, the range of interpretation has resulted in a lack of comparability among the studies (Hupcey, 1998). Another challenge may be the mentor's ability to gage the level of support a mentee may need at any given time, considering the delicate balance of under or over supporting. Districts may be hard pressed to find enough mentors that innately form strong relationships with mentees and this is not a skill that can be taught. Additionally, the wrong fit, relationship-wise, may cause the mentee more stress than support. Lastly, Social Support Theory does not explicitly promote reflective practices, which are necessary to learn all the proactive coping strategies for wellness.

## **Equity and Inclusion Considerations**

*“I am unapologetic about the need for social change, greater inclusion, and equity.”*

Marley Dias

To create a truly equitable and inclusive principal mentorship, multiple implications need to be addressed. Mentorships must reflect the needs and diversity of the principals they serve. Regardless of the level of training for mentors, the policies and procedures put in place by districts, and the sophistication of the induction program, there is no guarantee that mentoring will be beneficial for all mentees. As Douglas (1997) noted, the success of mentoring programs is dependent upon a range of factors.

One important factor is the theoretical underpinnings of mentoring as discussed in this paper, Critical Reflection Theory and Social Supports Theory. Social supports are universally accepted to combat stress and therefore are linked to wellness. However, social supports, as defined in western society, are not recognized as helpful for all people. Western cultures hold that a person is an individual and has a set of self-defining attributes, actions, beliefs, and goals (Taylor et al., 2007). Whereas the interdependent view prevalent in collectivistic cultures sees oneself as part of a society and bound to others. This impacts the relationships in mentoring. Cultural differences effect people’s willingness to seek social support during stressful periods (Taylor et al., 2007). Not only their willingness to receive social supports may differ, but also how much they will benefit from them.

An example is the difference between implicit and explicit social supports. In a study conducted by Taylor et al. (2007), including 81 undergraduates, 41 Asians and Asian Americans, and 40 European Americans, stress levels were measured when put in situations where they were engaging in implicit and explicit social support. The results suggested inappropriate forms of

social support exacerbated stress. Bearing in mind, Critical Reflection Theory, participants in this study stated they were concerned about potential negative implications of disclosing their problems to others and reported considerable psychological distress from explicit social supports. In other words, if a mentoring approach is not culturally relevant, it could have the reverse effect on mentees. In this same vein, not all people learn and grow from the same experiences. Mentorships have to be curtailed to meet each individual's needs and values.

The selection of the mentor is imperative to the process. According to Collins (1983), traditional mentor relationships were a dyad of a mentor and a protégé, in which the mentor is the supervisor or the authority figure and the novice is the protégé. In the past few decades, school districts have gone to a mentor model where mentors act as guides, coaches, peers, or advisors to break down these hierarchical relationships. Mentors are encouraged to be collaborative and to use inquiry-oriented approaches towards mentoring. Despite these changes, difficulties still exist in mentee and mentor relationships that require attention and correction.

Ehrich (2001) discussed the difficulties of accessing mentors for women and members of minority groups, including misunderstandings, incompatibility associated with gender and race. He also denotes that just as gender, race, and socio-economic status can act as barriers affecting the dynamics of mentoring, so can personality. Additionally, ideological differences were described as problematic. All these barriers affect the level of trust and motivation in the relationship. Being an experienced administrator is not enough when considering mentors. Many factors such as power imbalance, race, culture, ideology, gender, sexual orientation, expertise, and personality need to be taken into consideration when matching mentor with mentee. When mentorships are not a good fit, it can be stressful and detrimental to the new school leader. MacCallum and Baltiman (1999) recognized this important challenge in the selection of mentors,

stating that unsuccessful matches can be worse than no mentoring at all. Through mindful pairing and extensive mentor training, equitable and inclusive mentoring is more likely to happen. I would propose districts conduct interviews or utilize questionnaires, creating a systematic process to closely align mentors and mentees with close consideration of the whole person to make this experience individualized, positive, and meaningful to the novice leader. Mentoring cannot be a one size fits all approach to principal induction. Mentors must have extensive professional development to understand and be sensitive to issues related to inclusivity and equity that arise in mentoring relationships.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The data derived from the focus group interviews in this study allowed me to clearly answer the two research questions regarding sources of stress and the coping mechanisms employed by this group of new school leaders. In the beginning, as first year leaders, the stress levels were extremely high due to the demands outweighing their coping skills. The chronic workplace stress led to unhealthy leaders. As these leaders, learned from experience and grew in their roles, a new level of self-confidence emerged. These leaders also began to establish essential relationships as a sophisticated social support system. These connections fostered self-reflection, growth, and hope. As time passed and leaders were in their 5<sup>th</sup>-8th year in the field, the work was still challenging, but their coping skills had developed to a point where the stress became manageable. Some leaders described this shift as a survival tactic. All of the leaders in this study are still in school leadership roles and thriving.

Although this study provided a great deal of insight into the topic of stress and coping mechanisms among new school leaders, additional questions emerged. I wondered about the predisposition or characteristics of resilient leaders. Were these leaders naturally more inclined

to succeed in these roles or was it truly the development of skills, or a combination of these two aspects? To better understand why this group of school leaders managed to grow, thrive, and remain in this profession, I would recommend future research in the areas of predisposition, capabilities, and characteristics of resilient leaders. I recommend future research that looks closely at thriving school leaders and delineates what is innately their character and what has been learned in terms of how they cope with the stress of this profession. The School Leadership Institute experience had a significant influence on these leaders. I also wondered about the importance of the specific interventions in this study, including the retreat environment, focus group formats, and peer mentoring. Additionally, I would recommend conducting research and going deeper on the influence retreats, focus groups, and peer mentoring has on new school leaders' wellbeing and longevity in the role, with a large participant group with various backgrounds, to allow for generalization of the data.

### **Conclusion**

*“For schools to flourish, districts must consider the well-being of their leaders.”*

Superville (2021)

According to a growing body of research (Boyland, 2011; Friedman, 2002; Klocko & Wells, 2015; Lashway, 2003; Sorenson, 2007), chronic stress is prevalent among new school administrators. Although some level of struggle or stretch is inevitable when becoming a school administrator, why should this be a rite of passage-type experience? It is time to rethink this construct and establish a positive way forward. Given proper supports and guidance on stress management techniques, the initial years could be better achieved. Over the past few decades, a paradigm shift has led to reframing mentoring in school districts to combat burnout and high

turnover rates among novice school leaders. However, these mentorships typically miss the mark. These mentorships rarely address the most crucial elements of surviving in this profession—how to manage stress and remain healthy. In my current role as a district-level administrator, I am assigned a mentee every year. I am always struck by the list of 25 categories I am asked to cover with my mentee, none of which are related to their management of stress or their health and wellness. One solution to this problem is an alternative comprehensive mentorship program that is centered on social support, wellness practices, promoting specific proactive coping strategies, self-care, healthy boundaries, positive work structures, and emotional self-awareness. Both Critical Reflection Theory and Social Support Theory were considered as theoretical constructs to ground this solution. These theories have ample affordances and constraints. The juxtaposition of these theories is that a wellness-focused mentorship would require both reflection and social supports. In addressing implications of equity and inclusion within mentoring, race, culture, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, ideology, and personality are crucial considerations when pairing mentors and mentees. Effective mentoring requires complex skills and expertise to understand the issues surrounding imbalance of power, as well as the ability to differentiate their practice to meet individuals' needs in learning and growing as leaders. Without existing studies on wellness-focused mentorship models, there is not existing data to draw upon. There is insufficient data on the theoretical grounding of mentoring supports. More research is needed in these areas. In essence, chronic stress is prevalent among new school leaders which in turn impacts student achievement. A wellness-centered mentorship could provide novice principals with the skills necessary and social support to thrive early on in their journey to becoming a resilient leader and ensure longevity in their profession.

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## APPENDIX A: IRB PROTOCOL

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PROTOCOL  
Social, Behavioral &  
Education Research  
Colorado State  
University

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

Personnel Information .....	1
Subject Population .....	2
Study Location .....	2
General Checklist .....	3
Funding .....	3
Expedited Paragraphs .....	4
Purpose, Study Procedures, Background .....	5
Subject Population .....	7
Subject Population .....	8
Risks .....	8
Benefits, Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality .....	9
Potential Conflict of Interest .....	9
Informed Consent .....	10
Assent Background .....	11
Attachments .....	11
Obligations .....	11
Event History .....	12

PROTOCOL  
Social, Behavioral &  
Education Research  
Colorado State  
University

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

**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? three (3) years	PIs must complete Training every three (3) years	Y

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

**Other Researcher or Key Personnel**

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

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

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**\*\*\* Subject Population \*\*\***

**Subject Population(s) Checklist**

Select All That Apply :

- 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

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\*\*\* 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)

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.

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**\*\*\* 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 participant 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.

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**\*\*\* 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.

INA

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 decision-making 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.

<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Interview/Focus Group Questions</b>
<b>Attachment</b>	Focus Group Questions
<b>Document Name</b>	Focus Group Questions

<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Recruitment Material (e.g., flyers, email text, verbal scripts)</b>
<b>Attachment</b>	Cooner.recruitment
<b>Document Name</b>	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 re-reviewed;

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

## APPENDIX B: IRB FORM #19-9521H

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e-PROTOCOL

PROTOCOL  
IRB Form

Protocol # 19-9521H  
Date Printed: 03/29/2021

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Personnel Information.....	1
Subject Checklist.....	3
Study Location.....	3
General Checklist.....	4
Funding.....	5
Application Type Checklist.....	5
Exempt Paragraphs(s).....	5
Summary, Purpose, Procedures.....	7
Background and additional procedures.....	9
Subject Population (a-f).....	10
Subject Population (g-j).....	10
Recruitment Process, Subject Compensation and Costs.....	11
Risks.....	12
Benefits.....	13
Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality.....	13
Consent Information.....	14
Assent Background.....	15
HIPAA.....	15
Potential Conflict of Interest.....	16
Attachments.....	17
Obligations.....	18

IRB Use Only ..... 19

Event History ..... 19

**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**Protocol Status:** APPROVED  
**Date Submitted:** 10/21/2019  
**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 \*\*\*

**Principal Investigator Mandatory**

CSU defines "Investigator" as an individual who conducts a research study. If the study is conducted by a team of individuals, the Investigator is the responsible leader of the team. Students, fellows and residents may not act as a Principal Investigator.

Name of Principal Investigator*	Degree (MD/PhD/BSN/etc.)	Title
Cooner, Donna	EdD	Professor
Email*	Phone	Fax
Donna.Cooner@ColoState.EDU	(970) 491-5536	
Research Department	CSU Status Check ALL that apply*	Mailing Address
School of Education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

ALL research personnel are required to complete Human Subject Research training from CITI within the last 3 years prior to engaging in any research-related activities. Go to CITI Program to complete.  
 Any NIH funded clinical trials require GCP training.  
 The Research Compliance Office will verify the last date of completion below.

CITI Training Date*	Type of CITI training completed.*
09/21/2017	Group 2 Social/Behavioral

**Training Details**

No training data is available.

**CO-Principal Investigator**

Name of Co-Principal Investigator*	Degree (MD/PhD/BSN/etc.)	Title
Email*	Phone	Fax
Research Department	CSU Status Check ALL that apply*	Mailing Address
	<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

ALL research personnel are required to complete Human Subject Research training from CITI within the last 3 years prior to engaging in any research-related activities. Go to CITI Program to complete.  
 Any NIH funded clinical trials require GCP training.  
 The Research Compliance Office will verify the last date of completion below.

CITI Training Date	Type of CITI training completed.*

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<b>Training Details</b>
No training data is available.

**Department Head Mandatory**

<b>Name of Department Head*</b>	<b>Degree (MD/PhD/BSN/etc.)</b>	<b>Title</b>
Faircloth, Susan		Professor
<b>Email*</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Fax</b>
Susan.Faircloth@colostate.edu	(970) 491-6316	
<b>Research Department</b>	<b>CSU Status Check ALL that apply*</b>	<b>Mailing Address</b>
244	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
ALL research personnel are required to complete Human Subject Research training from CITI within the last 3 years prior to engaging in any research-related activities. Go to CITI Program to complete.		
Any NIH funded clinical trials require GCP training.		
The Research Compliance Office will verify the last date of completion below.		
<b>CITI Training Date</b>	<b>Type of CITI training completed.*</b>	
	Group 2 Social/Behavioral	
<b>Training Details</b>		
No training data is available.		

**Administrative Contact**

<b>Name of Administrative Contact*</b>	<b>Degree (MD/PhD/BSN/etc.)</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>Email*</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Fax</b>
<b>Research Department</b>	<b>CSU Status Check ALL that apply*</b>	<b>Mailing Address</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
ALL research personnel are required to complete Human Subject Research training from CITI within the last 3 years prior to engaging in any research-related activities. Go to CITI Program to complete.		
Any NIH funded clinical trials require GCP training.		
The Research Compliance Office will verify the last date of completion below.		
<b>CITI Training Date</b>	<b>Type of CITI training completed.*</b>	

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<b>Training Details</b>	
No training data is available.	

-----  
**\*\*\* Subject Checklist \*\*\***

**Subject Checklist**

Select All That Apply :

- Children under 18
- Pregnant women
- Fetuses/neonates
- Prisoners
- Military personnel
- X Adult Volunteers
- Economically/educationally disadvantaged
- Individuals with impaired decision-making capacity
- University students
- University employees
- Illiterate
- Homeless
- Public officials/candidates for public office
- Institutionalized patients/residents
- Persons incompetent to give consent (e.g., dementia, comatose, have legal guardians)
- Healthy Individuals

Other (please specify):

-----  
**\*\*\* Study Location \*\*\***

**Study Location**

Select All That Apply - NOTE: Check "Other" and input text: 1.) If your study 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)

- X Colorado State University
- Colorado State University - Pueblo
- University of Colorado Health
- University of Colorado Boulder
- University of Colorado - Colorado Springs
- University of Colorado Denver
- Other University/College
- Other Medical/Health Care Facility

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**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
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School/School District

Other (please specify)

**Has this protocol been submitted to any other Institutional Review Board not listed above?** N  
**Is this a multi-site project? (A multi-site study is one where different PIs at different institutions are conducting the same study or aspects of the same study.)** N  
**Will Colorado State University function as the coordinating center or lead institution?** Y  
 (Please submit an IRB approval or Letter of Permission/Support from other locations, if applicable, and for any site not under the jurisdiction of the CSU IRBs.)

-----  
**\*\*\* General Checklist \*\*\***

**General Checklist**

Select All That Apply :

Request to Rely on Another IRB - Please upload completed Request to Rely and associated documents in attachment section  
IRB Authorization Agreement (IAA), Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU), etc.(attach in the Attachments section (This only applies to studies where the Client IRB is the Reviewing IRB).

Industry-Sponsored Clinical Trial

X Interview

X Questionnaire/Survey

Thesis or Dissertation Project (Please upload proposal and dissertation/thesis committee approval in Attachments section.)

Radioisotopes/radiation-producing machines, even if standard of care (Radiation Safety)

Human blood, cells, tissues, or body fluids (Institutional BioSafety)

Tissues to be stored for future research projects

Tissues to be sent out of this institution as part of a research agreement (Material Transfer Agreement (MTA))

Human Embryos

Human Embryonic Cells? Provide NIH Code Number(s) or state that no federal funding will be used to support this research.

Use of Patient related equipment? If Yes, specify what equipment is being used.

Medical equipment used for human patients/subjects also used on animals.

Protocol involves studying potentially addicting drugs.

Investigational drugs, reagents, or chemicals

Commercially available drugs, reagents, or other chemicals administered to subjects (even if they are not being studied)

Investigational Device

This study involves drugs or devices regulated by FDA

Cancer Subjects (e.g., clinical trials, behavior/prevention) or Cancer Tissues (e.g., blood, cells, body fluids).

This study is or will be posted on ClinicalTrials.gov

If checked, Specify number:

Protected Health Information (PHI) will be viewed, created, accessed, used, or disclosed.

HIPAA Authorization

Waiver or Alteration of Authorization

Activities Preparatory to Research

-----

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Limited Data Set and Data Use Agreement  
 Use and Disclosure of Decedents PHI without Authorization  
 Class Project  
 Other (clarify in text box to the right)

\*\*\* Funding \*\*\*

NONE--This project does not have any funding. If you want to add Funding for the study, please uncheck "NONE."

Funding

Add external and internal grant funding source(s) below: Federal Government, Other Gov. (i.e., State, local), Foundation or Other. Select "None" above if there is no external funding for the study.

It is CSU Policy to review grant applications with IRB submissions for congruency. Upload your grant in the attachment section.

Funding for this study was secured by the Office of Sponsored Programs

\*\*\* Application Type Checklist \*\*\*

Application type checklist

Not Human Subjects Research  
 Exempt  
 Expedited/Full Board

\*\*\* Exempt Paragraphs(s) \*\*\*

There are eight categories of research activities involving human subjects that may be exempt from the requirements of the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46). Select from the following applicable categories to determine if your research is exempt from expedited or full committee review. If your research qualifies under one or more of the exempt categories, proceed with the following application. If not, complete the expedited or full review application.

NOTE: The exempt categories below do not apply to research involving prisoners. For research subject to Subpart C (Additional Protections Pertaining to Biomedical and Behavioral Research Involving Prisoners as Subjects), the Final Rule changed the pre-2018 rule to allow the exemptions to apply to Subpart C for "research involving a broader subject population if the research only incidentally includes prisoners" (HHS 2017). Secondary research (using the information or biospecimens) with subjects who are prisoners is allowed by the Final Rule if the research is not seeking to examine prisoners as a subpopulation. The Final Rule allows subjects to continue in exempt research if they become prisoners during a study.

Select one or more of the following paragraphs applicable to your project:

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- X 1. **EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact student's opportunity to learn required educational content of the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most:**
- X i. Research on regular and special education instructional strategies; OR
  - X ii. Research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- This category does not apply to use of school records of identifiable students or interviewing instructors about specific students.
2. **EDUCATIONAL TESTS (COGNITIVE, DIAGNOSTIC, APTITUDE, ACHIEVEMENT), SURVEY PROCEDURES, INTERVIEW PROCEDURES, OR OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR (INCLUDING VISUAL OR AUDITORY RECORDING): Research involving these procedures is exempt, IF one of the following is correct:**
- i. Any information obtained is recorded in such a manner that subjects CANNOT be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; OR
  - ii. Any disclosure of the subject's responses outside of the research could NOT reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; OR
  - iii. Any information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects CAN readily be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, AND an IRB conducts a Limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7) and the research is not subject to 45 CFR 46 Subpart D.
- This exemption does not apply to children except for research involving observation of public behavior when the investigator does not interact with the children. Workplace meetings and activities, as well as classroom activities, are not considered "public behavior".
3. **RESEARCH INVOLVING BENIGN BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS in conjunction with the collection of information from adult subjects through verbal or written response (including data entry) or audiovisual recording, if the subject prospective agrees to the intervention and information collection, is exempt, IF**
- i. Any information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, OR
  - ii. Any disclosure of the subject's responses outside of the research could NOT reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, or reputation; OR
  - iii. Any information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a Limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).
4. **EXISTING DATA: Secondary Research involving collection or study of existing data, documents, records, or biospecimens, for which consent is not required is exempt, IF:**
- i. The identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens are publicly available; OR
  - ii. Information, which may include information about biospecimens, is recorded by the researcher in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, the investigator does not contact the subjects, and the investigator will not re-identify the subjects; OR
  - iii. The research involves only information collection and analysis involving the investigator's use of identifiable health information when that use is regulated under 45 CFR parts 160 and 164, subpart A and E, for the purposes of "health care operations" or "research" as those terms are defined at 45 CFR 164.501 or for "public health activities and purposes" as described under 45 CFR 1.512(b); OR
  - iv. The research is conducted by, or on behalf of, a Federal department or agency using government-generated or government-collected information obtained for non-research activities, if the research generates identifiable private information that is or will be maintained on information technology that is subject to and in compliance with section 298(b) of the E-Government Act of 2002, 44 U.S.C. 3501 note, if all of the identifiable private information collected, used, or generated as part of the activity will be maintained in systems of records subject to the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 5521, and, if applicable, the information used in the research was collected subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, 44 U.S.C. 3501et seq.
5. **RESEARCH AND DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS CONDUCTED BY OR SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF DEPARTMENT OR AGENCY HEADS: This research is exempt IF it is designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine:**

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- i. Public benefit or service programs;
- ii. Procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs;OR
- iii. Possible changes in or alternatives to those programs, OR
- iv. Changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.

Such projects include, but are not limited to, internal studies by Federal employees, and studies under contracts of consulting arrangements, cooperative agreements, or grants. Exempt projects also include waivers of otherwise mandatory requirements using authorities such as sections 1115 and 115A of the Social Security Act, as amended.

Note:Each Federal department or agency conducting or supporting research and demonstration projects must establish, on a publicly accessible Federal Web site or in such other manner as the department or agency head may determine, a list of the research and demonstration projects that the Federal department or agency conducts or supports under this provision. The research or demonstration project must be published on this list prior to commencing the research involving human subjects.

- 6. TASTE AND FOOD QUALITY EVALUATION AND CONSUMER ACCEPTANCE STUDIES: This research is exempt, IF:**
- i. Wholesome foods without additives are consumed; OR
  - ii. A food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA); OR
  - iii. A food is consumed that contains an agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe by the FDA or approved by the EPA or the FSIS of the USDA
- 7. STORAGE OR MAINTENANCE OF INFORMATION FOR SECONDARY RESEARCH FOR WHICH BROAD CONSENT IS REQUIRED: The protocol is eligible for exemption if:**
- i. It involves storage or maintenance of identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens for secondary research use; AND
  - ii. All the identifiable information or identifiable biospecimens that are to be stored and/or maintained for secondary research have been or will be collected for another "primary" purpose; AND
  - iii. Broad consent for the storage or maintenance of their identifiable information or identifiable biospecimens for secondary research use will be obtained from ALL subjects; AND
  - iv. The protocol does not include any activities that do not qualify for exemption; AND
  - v. The protocol is not for an FDA regulated clinical investigation; AND
  - vi. The IRB conducts a Limited IRB Review and makes the determinations required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(8)
- 8. SECONDARY RESEARCH FOR WHICH BROAD CONSENT IS REQUIRED: Research involving the use of identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens for secondary research use is eligible for exemption, if the following criteria are met:**
- i. Broad consent for the storage, maintenance, and secondary research use of the identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens was obtained in accordance with 45 CFR 46.116(a)(1) through (4), (a)(6), and (d); AND
  - ii. Documentation of informed consent or waiver of documentation of consent was obtained in accordance with 45 CFR 46.117; AND
  - iii. An IRB conducts a Limited IRB review and makes the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7) and makes the determination that the research to be conducted is within the scope of the broad consent referenced in paragraph (d)(8)(i) of this section; AND
  - iv. The investigator does not include returning individual research results to subjects as part of the study plan. This provision does not prevent an investigator from abiding by any legal requirements to return individual research results.

**\*\*\* Summary, Purpose, Procedures \*\*\***

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

Colorado State University School Leadership Institute

**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
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Proposed Start Date: 12/13/2019 Proposed End Date: 01/01/2022

1. Summary

a) Provide a brief summary of the scope of work of this project, using non-technical terms that would be understood by a non-scientific reader. This summary should be no more than 200 words.

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.

2. Purpose

a) Describe the purpose for the proposed project as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined.

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 do the investigators hope to learn from this project?

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

c) Please share your plans to share the results of this study with intentions to influence behavior, practice, theory, future research designs.

Results of this study will be shared with principal preparation programs through publications and materials to highlight identified best curricular practices.

3. Procedures

a) Describe in chronological order of event(s) how the activities will be conducted, providing information about all procedures (e.g. interventions/interactions with subjects, data collection, photographing, audio and video recording), including follow up procedures.

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 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.

i) Be sure to identify what procedures are experimental and what are standard of care or established practice for the condition/situation.

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) Explain who will conduct the procedures and where and when they will take place. Indicate the frequency and duration of visits/sessions as well as the subject's total time commitment for the study. Include how the data will be collected (i.e. in person or online).

Focus groups will be conducted by trained research assistants not familiar to the participants

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i) **Indicate that the instruments used are in the public domain or provide appropriate documentation of permission to use each scale.**

Focus group questions are designed by researchers

c) **For school-based activities where class time is used, describe in detail the activities planned for non-subjects and explain where both subjects and nonsubjects will be located during the activities.**

No class time is used

d) **State if deception will be used. If so, provide a rationale and describe debriefing procedures. Submit a debriefing script in attachments section**

No deception will be used

e) **Will audio or video taping of individuals occur? Will photographs of individuals be taken? Describe what will become of the tapes/photographs (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. No photographs will be taken.

f) **Will the proposed research involve the use of existing data/specimens? (This is mandatory at this time, please select any regardless of applicability until corrected.)**

- i. The research involves data from publicly available sources
- ii. That data will be recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified.
- iii. Any link to identifying information has been destroyed

If YES to any of these for the whole of your research activities, please contact RICRO\_IRB@mail.colostate.edu for guidance on submitting the Exempt Application or Expedited/Full or review exempt categories at: <https://vpr.colostate.edu/ricro/irb/submit-a-protocol/>

**\*\*\* Background and additional procedures \*\*\***

**4. Background and additional procedures**

a. **Relevant Background: Discuss the present knowledge, appropriate literature and rationale for conducting the research. Include the rationale for the selected subject population.**

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.

b. **Do any of the following apply.**

- i. Will subjects be audio recorded? Y
- ii. Will subjects be videotaped? N
- iii. Will subjects be photographed? N

**If yes to i, ii or iii, explain the collection process and use in the context of this research of such media**

Only researchers will have access to audio recordings. If a participant 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.

(Explicit consent must be obtained for use of these methods for Expedited and Full Board studies.)

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-----

\*\*\* Subject Population (a-f) \*\*\*

5. Subject Population

a) How many subjects to you intend to enroll and/or how many subject records to you intend to access?

i. At this site

# of subjects

# of records

ii. At all sites

N/A

# of subjects

# of records

b) Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria (e.g., Participants must have 20/20 vision, Participants must be 30-45 years of age, etc.)

i. Identify inclusion criteria.

ii. Identify exclusion criteria.

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

d) State if any of the subjects are students, employees, or laboratory personnel. Please explain how subjects will be protected from coercion and undue influence N/A

e) Please describe the expertise you have, or have access to, which prepares you to conduct research in this location and/or with this subject population, including specific qualifications (e.g., relevant coursework, background, experience, and training). Also, explain your knowledge of local community attitudes and cultural norms and cultural sensitivities necessary to carry out the research (e.g., differences with U.S. culture).

\*\*\* Subject Population (g-j) \*\*\*

-----

**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**Protocol Status:** APPROVED  
**Date Submitted:** 10/21/2019  
**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.

5. Subject Population

- f) **Will bilingual or multilingual subjects be recruited?** N
- g) **Will non-English speaking subjects be recruited?** N  
 If yes, state language(s) spoken (other than English):
- h) **Will subjects be less than 18 years of age?** N
- i) **Describe any planned screening procedures. Attach your screening document(s) (e.g., health history questionnaire) in the Attachment Section (#16).**

-----  
**\*\*\* Recruitment Process, Subject Compensation and Costs \*\*\***

6. Recruitment Process:

- a) **Describe the step-by-step procedures for identifying and recruiting potential research subjects or requesting pre-existing data or materials.**

- List any specific agencies or institutions that will provide access to prospective subjects.
- Identify who will contact prospective subjects and how.

Participants will be CSU graduates of the 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.

- b) **Planned Subject Identification Methods:**

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| N/A                               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct advertising |
| Chart/database review             | Living conditions (e.g., nursing home residents)       |
| Class participants                | From PI's own practice/clinic/class                    |
| Circumstance (e.g., homelessness) | Referrals  |
| Organization mailing lists        | CSU Subject Pool <input type="text"/>                  |
| Other (please specify):           |  |

- c) **Planned Recruitment Materials/Methods:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| N/A   | Flyers/posters                             |
| Phone Scripts   | Letters to providers/schools/organizations |
| Television ads  | Newspaper ads                              |
| Letters to prospective subjects                               | Radio ads                                  |
| Oral Scripts  | PowerPoint presentations                   |
| Internet ads/postings   | Email                                      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Face to face interactions | CSU Subject Pool <input type="text"/>      |
| Other (please specify):                                       |  |

(All advertising must be submitted for review in its final printed/recorded form)

Note: Attach copies of ALL recruitment materials in the attachment Section

7. Subject Compensation and Costs:

-----

**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**Protocol Status:** APPROVED  
**Date Submitted:** 10/21/2019  
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- a) **Will subjects receive compensation for participation?** N  
**Total amount (in dollars or equivalent)**
- b) **Form of Compensation:**
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Cash<br>Check<br>Gift card/certificate<br>Voucher | Raffles/lotteries<br>Course/extra credit<br>Reimbursement only<br>Other (please specify) <input style="width: 100px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
|---|---|
- c) **Describe the remuneration plan (Include when subjects will be paid, whether payment will be prorated and whether a 1099 will be issued.)**
- d) **For raffles include the number of prizes, nature and value of each prize. If possible, include odds of winning.**
- e) **If extra course credit is offered be sure to address the alternative means by which students can accrue extra course credit should they not wish to participate in the study.**

-----

**\*\*\* Risks \*\*\***

**8. 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."

X Minimal Risk: probability and magnitude are not greater than everyday living OR are encountered in daily or routine medical, dental or psychological exams

**b) Describe all known risks or discomforts associated with study procedures.**

- 1) **Physical well-being**
- 2) **Psychological well-being**
- 3) **Economic well-being**
- 4) **Social well-being**

-----

**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**Protocol Status:** APPROVED  
**Date Submitted:** 10/21/2019  
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- c) Describe the procedures or safeguards in place to protect against or minimize potential risks (e.g., referral to psychological counseling resources).
- N/A

\*\*\* Benefits \*\*\*

9. Benefits

- a) Discuss any potential benefits that would justify involvement of subjects in this study.
- i. Direct benefits to subjects (if applicable)
  - ii. Indirect benefits to society
- b) Explain how the potential benefits justify the potential risks involved in participation in this research.

\*\*\* Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality \*\*\*

10. Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality

Which of the following types of data will you work with:

Identifiable Information is considered to be identifiable when it can be linked to specific individuals by the investigator(s) either directly or indirectly through coding systems, or when characteristics of the information obtained are such that by their nature a reasonably knowledgeable person or investigator could ascertain the identities of individuals. Therefore, even though a dataset may have been stripped of direct identifiers (names, addresses, student ID numbers, etc.), it may still be possible to identify an individual through a combination of other characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, and place of employment).

Anonymous Data are anonymous if no one, not even the researcher, can connect the data to the person who provided it--no identifying information is collected from the individual. Investigators must be aware, however, that even if no direct identifiers (name, address, student ID, etc.) are collected, identification of a participant may be possible from unique individual characteristics (indirect identifiers). For example, a participant who is a member of a certain ethnic group or who was studied because of distinctive personal accomplishments or medical history might be identifiable from even a large data pool.

- X De-identified If the dataset has been stripped of all identifying information and there is no way that it could be linked back to the subjects from whom it was originally collected (through a key to a coding system or by any other means). Note: This also applies if the source of the data is identifiable but the data collected is not.

Coded This refers to data that have been stripped of all direct subject identifiers, but in this case each record has its own study ID or code, which is linked to identifiable information such as name or medical record number. The linking file must be separate from the coded data set. This linking file may be held by someone on the study team (e.g. the PI) or it could be held by someone outside of the study team (e.g. researcher at another institution). A coded data set may include limited identifiers under HIPAA. Of note, the code itself may not contain identifiers such as subject initials or medical record number.

- a) If information derived from the study will be provided to the subject's personal physician, a government agency, or any other person or group (other than the research team), describe to whom the information will be given and the nature of the information, if applicable. N/A

**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**Protocol Status:** APPROVED  
**Date Submitted:** 10/21/2019  
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b) Explain how you will protect subjects' privacy. Note: Privacy refers to persons and their interest in controlling the access of others to themselves. For example, based on their privacy interest's people want to control:

- The time and place where they give information.
- The nature of the information they give.
- The nature of the experiences that are given to them.
- Who receives and can use the information.

For example, persons might not want to be seen entering a place that might stigmatize them, such as a pregnancy-counseling center that is clearly identified as such by signs on the front of the building. Please keep this definition in mind as you respond to this item.

Focus groups will be conducted in a research setting and participants can voluntarily opt out. If they decide to participate in the discussion, they can determine the nature of the information they give.

c) Describe how you will maintain the confidentiality of subjects' information. Note: Confidentiality pertains to the treatment of information that an individual has disclosed in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others (without permission) in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure. Please keep this definition in mind as you respond to this item.

Researchers will allow the interviewee to dictate their conformability regarding any signifiers of identification, and respect and honor their position.

d) Who will have access to study records or specimens? (Please identify specific team members by name.)

Only the principal investigator and research team: Wendy Fothergill, Juliana Searle, and Donna Cooner

e) If you plan to use existing data, records or specimens, what is the source of the data/records/specimens, and how will you access them? NOTE: "Existing" means data or specimens collected (i.e., on the shelf) prior to the IRB application submission. It includes data or specimens collected for research and non-research activities.

Data will be kept by researchers in a personal office in a secure location and digital information will be stored in a secure fashion under password protect. Only researchers will have access to transcripts from focus groups. Audio transcriber/s will have access to recordings, but will have no identifiers attached to the audio. Audio files will be transcribed without names attached, then destroyed.

f) How will subjects be asked to provide their permission for release of identifiable data collected as a part of this proposed research (e.g., pictures, recordings, responses to research questions), now or in future? Explain and include appropriate statements in consent materials.

Subjects will sign a consent form for recordings and for participation. Consent forms will be kept in a secure online location under password protect.

g) If using existing data/biological specimens, will the researchers have access to a code linking the data to personally identifiable information?

N/A

h) If the data is coded, explain where the key to identifiers will be stored, how it will be protected, and who will have access to it.

N/A

i) Explain why, where, in what format, and for how long data/specimens will be retained.

Transcripts of audio recordings will be kept for five years then destroyed.

**\*\*\* Consent Information \*\*\***

11. Consent Information

11 a & b only apply to exempt applications

a) How will subjects be informed of procedures, intent of the study, and potential risks to them?

-----

**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**Protocol Status:** APPROVED  
**Date Submitted:** 10/21/2019  
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Subjects will be informed in person and in writing.

**b) How will subjects be informed they may withdraw at any timewithout penalty?**

Subjects will be informed in person and in writing.

Note: Attach, in the Attachments Section, written and/or verbal instructions the subject will receive.

See sample consent forms at <https://vpr.colostate.edu/ricro/irb/templates/>

Please provide consent process background information below.

-----

**\*\*\* Assent Background \*\*\***

**12. Assent Background**

(Complete if applicable)

**Assent Document:** A form or script of the information that will be conveyed to the child about the study. In general, researcher must obtain the affirmative agreement of children ages seven years and older for their participation. Assent forms should be written at a level understandable to the child. If the study includes a broad age range of children, more than one assent form may be needed (i.e., an assent from suitable for a 17 year old is not usually suitable for a 7 year old child).

**Assent Waiver:** No child assent will be sought at all. This means that the IRB is asked to waive the requirement for child assent. Among other circumstances, this option is appropriate when the capability of the child to understand the research is too limited or when the research holds out a prospect of direct benefits that is important to the health or well-being of the child.

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 consent/assent forms at <https://vpr.colostate.edu/ricro/irb/templates/>

Provide assent process background information, in the space below, for each Assent Form, Alteration Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script), and Waiver.

-----

**\*\*\* HIPAA \*\*\***

**13. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)**

**If you are using PHI and this page is not active you must return to the General Checklist and check the box regarding the use of PHI in this research.**

The HIPAA Privacy Rule establishes the right of an individual to authorize a covered entity, such as health plan, health care clearinghouse or health care provider, to use and disclose his/her Protected Health Information (PHI) for research purposes.

The Privacy Rule defines the elements of individual information that comprise PHI and establishes the conditions under which PHI may be used or disclosed by covered entities for research purposes. It also includes provisions to allow an individual's PHI to be disclosed or used in research without the person's authorization (i.e., IRB Waiver of HIPAA Requirement Authorization).

**Is Your Research Covered by HIPAA's Privacy Rule?**

Protected Health Information (PHI) is health information with one or more of the following identifiers. For more information see: [http://privacyruleandresearch.nih.gov/clin\\_research.asp](http://privacyruleandresearch.nih.gov/clin_research.asp) or consult HIPAA Privacy Rule for Research

Research which involves the use of de-identified data is exempt from HIPAA requirements. In order to be de-identified data, NONE of the subject identifiers listed below can be collected, used, reviewed, recoded, accessed or disclosed.

Please review the following list and indicate if any of the information will be collected from any medical records for the purpose of this research project.

**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**Protocol Status:** APPROVED  
**Date Submitted:** 10/21/2019  
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1. Names
2. Social Security Numbers
3. Telephone Numbers
4. All geographic subdivisions smaller than a state, including street address, city, county, precinct, zip code, and their equivalent geocodes, except for the initial three digits of a zip code, if according to the current publicly available data from the Bureau of the Census;
  - i. The geographic unit formed by combining all zip codes with the same three initial digits contains more than 20,000 people; and
  - ii. The initial three digits of a zip code for all such geographic units containing 20,000 or fewer people is changed to 000.
5. All elements of dates (except year) for dates directly related to an individual, including birth date, admission date, discharge date, date of death; and all wages over 89 and all elements of dates (including year) indicative of such age, except that such ages and elements may be aggregated into a single category of age 90 or older.
6. Fax Numbers
7. Electronic Mail Addresses
8. Medical Record Numbers
  - You must attach a data collection sheet identifying the data points being collected from the MRN
9. Health Plan Beneficiary Numbers
10. Account Numbers
11. Certificate/License Numbers
12. Vehicle Identifiers and Serial Numbers, including License Plate Numbers
13. Device Identifiers and Serial Numbers
14. Web Universal Resource Locations (URLs)
15. Internet Protocol (IP) Address Numbers
16. Biometric Identifiers, including Finger and Voice Prints
17. Full Face Photographic Images and any Comparable Images
18. Any other unique identifying number, character, or code (note this does not mean the unique code assigned by the Investigator(s) to code the research data)

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

**15. Potential Conflict of Interest**

**Conflict of Interest and the definitions related to the Conflict of Interest Policy and the following questions, please refer to the Help Screen.**

**Conflict of Interest: Please check Yes or No for each item below.**

- a) Does the research involve a drug, device, or biological invented by you, an immediate family member or other Research Personnel?
- b) Is the research sponsored by an entity with which you, an immediate family member, or other Research Personnel have a paid consulting or advising relationship?
- c) Will you, members of your immediate family, or other Research Personnel receive special compensation or increased compensation if the research generates a favorable outcome?
- d) Will you, members of your immediate family, or other Research Personnel receive any money, gift or anything of monetary value above and beyond the actual costs of enrollment, conduct of the research, and reporting on the results, including, but not limited to, finders fees, referral fees, recruitment bonuses, and an enrollment bonus for reaching an accrual goal or similar types of payments?
- e) Do you, members of your immediate family or other Research Personnel have any other interests or relationships (including volunteer services) that might constitute a conflict of interest or an appearance of conflict of interest in connection with the research project?
- f) Will the payment you receive for services provided during the conduct of the research (e.g., investigator and Research Personnel time and tests) be inconsistent with fair market value for those services?

**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**Protocol Status:** APPROVED  
**Date Submitted:** 10/21/2019  
**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.

time and tests) be inconsistent with fair market value for those services?

**Significant Financial Interest: Please check Yes or No for each item below.**

- g) Will you, your immediate family members or other Research Personnel receive salaries, royalties and/or other payments for services (e.g., consulting fees, honoraria, research design, management position, independent contractor, service on advisory or review committees, board membership seminars, lectures or teaching engagements when totaled together exceeded \$5,000 during the previous 12 months or are expected to exceed \$5,000 over the next 12 months)? This excludes reasonable costs of conducting the research, as specified in the research agreement.
- h) Do you, your immediate family members, or other Research Personnel hold any ownership interests including stocks, bonds, or stock options that exceed \$5,000 and/or that constitute more than a five percent (5%) ownership interest in the sponsoring organization? This does not include any interests held solely by reason of investment in a business by a mutual, pension or other institutional investment fund over which the investigator and/or his or her immediate family do not exercise day-to-day control of investment decisions.

**Minimizing Risks and Disclosure to Subjects**

- i) Have you disclosed any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest in the consent form? Research Personnel are required to disclose all such conflicts to all research participants in the research consent form.
- j) **What steps, if any, have you taken or will you take to manage the conflict of interest and minimize the risks associated with any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest arising out of this research?**

If you checked Yes to any statement (a-h, except f) above, please identify the research team member(s) below and provide details concerning the potential conflict of interest.

By submitting this form, you are attesting that you have read the Client HRPP Policy on Conflict of Interest and agree to abide by its terms. You will update this disclosure form when new or changes in conflict of interest arise, and that you will comply with any conflict management plan required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to manage, reduce, or eliminate any actual or potential conflict of interest for the duration of the research.

Link to Client's Conflict of Interest Policy: <https://vpr.colostate.edu/nicro/coil/>.

**\*\*\* Attachments \*\*\***

**16. 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 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 the protocol (you 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 Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**Protocol Status:** APPROVED  
**Date Submitted:** 10/21/2019  
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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. 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	Document Name	Attached Date	Submitted Date
Interview/Focus Group Questions	Focus Group Questions	10/21/2019	10/21/2019
Recruitment Material (e.g., flyers, email text, verbal scripts)	Cooner.recruitment	10/21/2019	10/21/2019
Other Protocol Material	Focus Group Consent Form.Cooner	10/28/2019	
Other	19-9521H Cooner INTAKE	10/29/2019	10/29/2019

**\*\*\* Obligations \*\*\***

**Obligations**

The Principal Investigator is ultimately responsible for the conduct of this project.

**Obligations of the Principal Investigator include the following:**

Provide all subjects a copy of the signed consent form, if applicable.

Modifications - 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.

Training - Human subject training certificates, including those for any newly added personnel, will be provided for all key personnel. Training must be updated every three (3) years.

Final Report - The IRB will be notified when the study is complete.

I certify that I have reviewed this application, including attachments and that all information contained herein is accurate to the best of my knowledge. I agree to report any substantive changes to the information contained in this application immediately to the CSU IRB.

I agree to not enroll any subjects or collect any data intended only for research use prior to issuance of an IRB approval.

I agree to manage and maintain all of my research records, including consent retention, for at least three (3) after the close of this study or longer per sponsor requirement.

I understand that I am fully responsible for the execution and management of this study and that I am responsible for the performance of any subinvestigators or key personnel including their adherence to all of the applicable policies and regulations.

**This study will not begin until the investigator receives written final approval or determination of exemption.**

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

Submit the Continuing Review Form in order to maintain active status of the approved protocol. This form must be submitted to the IRB prior to the date of expiration.

Submit the Protocol Violation Form to report protocol Deviations/Violations or the Event Reporting Form to report Adverse Events (AEs) or Unanticipated Problems that occur in the course of the protocol.

**Protocol Title:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**Protocol Status:** APPROVED  
**Date Submitted:** 10/21/2019  
**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.

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

Please click "Check for Completeness" to your left to continue to the next step. If the protocol is complete and ready for submission, please click "Submit Form" to your left to submit your protocol for IRB Review.

\*\*\* IRB Use Only \*\*\*

Assigned to :

\*\*\* Event History \*\*\*

Event History

Date	Status	View Attachments	Letters
10/21/2019	NEW FORM CREATED		
10/21/2019	NEW FORM SUBMITTED	Y	
10/22/2019	NEW FORM PANEL ASSIGNED		
10/28/2019	NEW FORM REVIEWER(S) ASSIGNED		
10/28/2019	NEW FORM Comments Received (Cycle 1) - Completed		
10/28/2019	NEW FORM Comments Sent (Cycle 1)		
10/28/2019	NEW FORM Responses Received (Cycle 1)		
10/29/2019	NEW FORM APPROVED	Y	Y

Personnel Information .....	1
Subject Checklist .....	3
Study Location .....	3
General Checklist .....	4
Funding .....	5
Application Type Checklist .....	5
Exempt Paragraphs(s) .....	5
Summary, Purpose, Procedures .....	7
Background and additional procedures .....	9
Subject Population (a-f) .....	10
Subject Population (g-j) .....	10
Recruitment Process, Subject Compensation and Costs .....	11
Risks .....	12
Benefits .....	13
Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality .....	13
Consent Information .....	14
Assent Background .....	15
HIPAA .....	15
Potential Conflict of Interest .....	16
Attachments .....	17
Obligations .....	18

IRB Use Only ..... 19

Event History ..... 19

## APPENDIX C: NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH



eProtocol  
Office of the Vice President for Research  
321 General Services Building - Campus Delivery 2011 eprotocol  
TEL: (970) 491-1553  
FAX:

### NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

**DATE:** October 29, 2019  
**TO:** Cooner, Donna, School of Education  
Faircloth, Susan  
**FROM:** Felton-Noyle, Tammy, Senior IRB Coordinator, BMR, CSU IRB Exempt  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Colorado State University School Leadership Institute  
**FUNDING SOURCE:** NONE  
**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** 19-9521H

The CSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled: Colorado State University School Leadership Institute. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol.

**Full Board Review:** This protocol must be reviewed for renewal at least annually for as long as the research remains active. Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.

**Expedited Review:** This protocol is approved for a duration of three years, unless otherwise notified. You remain obligated to submit amendments, deviations, unanticipated problems per policy.

**Exempt Review:** This protocol is approved for a duration of five years. You remain obligated to submit amendments, deviations, unanticipated problems per policy.

**Important Reminder:** If you will consent your participants with a signed consent document, it is your responsibility to use the consent form that has been finalized and uploaded into the consent section of eProtocol by the IRB coordinators. Failure to use the finalized consent form available to you in eProtocol is a reportable protocol violation.

If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's Federal Wide Assurance 00000647 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under CSU's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please direct any questions about the IRB's actions on this project to:

IRB Office - (970) 491-1553; [IRB@colostate.edu](mailto:IRB@colostate.edu)

Claire Chance, Senior IRB Coordinator - (970) 491-1381; [Claire.Chance@colostate.edu](mailto:Claire.Chance@colostate.edu)

Tammy Felton-Noyle, IRB Biomedical Coordinator - (970) 491-1655; [Tammy.Felton-Noyle@colostate.edu](mailto:Tammy.Felton-Noyle@colostate.edu)

Felton-Noyle, Tammy

Initial exempt determination has been granted October 29, 2019 to recruit with the approved recruitment and consent procedures. The above-referenced research activity has been reviewed and determined to meet exempt review by the Institutional Review Board under exempt category 2(iii) of the 2018 Requirements. Approved documents include: Focus Group Questions; Focus Group Consent Form. Cooner; Cooner.Recruitment.

APPENDIX D: CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION  
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION

This certificate verifies that

**Jodie Rommel**

completed Colorado State University's human research protection training September 25, 2018. Attending this workshop will maintain your active status for human subjects protection training at Colorado State University through September 2021.

**Your next training should be completed before October 1, 2021.**

The training included the history of human subjects protection, the Belmont Report, the 45 CFR 46 and the Common Rule regulations, research ethics, institutional procedures, and common situations encountered in research, in addition to a question/answer period. Attendance of the entire session was required to obtain this certificate of completion. The course was developed at Colorado State University.

**Colorado State University**

*Knowledge to Go Places*



Issued: 9/25/2018

*Evelyn Swiss*

Administrator for Institutional Review Board, in conjunction with the Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office

## APPENDIX E: RESEARCHER NOTE

### Researcher Note

All data collected for this project was covered under Kualiti IRB Protocol 2957. De-identified data was shared with me for analysis after focus groups were conducted. (See note from the Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office below)

- Once research activities are completed and data has been de-identified, the project is outside the scope of the IRB. So, in the case that the project was closed to enrollment and data was no longer identifiable, adding someone to the project through an amendment to help with de-identified data analysis would **not** be required.

## APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

### COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY Center for Educator Preparation

Research Study: School Leadership Institute  
Researcher's Names: Dr. Donna Cooner, Dr. Wendy Fothergill, and Juliana Searle, M.Ed.

#### 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 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.

##### **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