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**Why Teacher Leaders Don't Want to Be Principals:
Evidence from Arkansas**

March 11, 2009

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF ADMINISTRATION

Why Teacher Leaders Don't Want to Be Principals: Evidence from Arkansas

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Abstract

This study investigates why teachers, identified by their school principal as being leaders or having leadership potential, chose not to become school principals. At a time in which the literature is reporting a shortage of qualified applicants for school administrative positions the identified reasons most cited by teacher leaders include testing/accountability pressures too great, job generally too stressful, too much time required, and societal problems make it difficult to focus on instruction. The key factors for teacher leaders choosing not to pursue a career in school administration are categorized as stress and time demands are too great.

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Quality school leadership is a primary correlate of effective schools. Leadership has been identified by researchers and confirmed as the key component of successful schools. Sustaining quality school leadership is as essential as having a highly qualified teacher for every classroom. Both are necessary for schools to be effective in educating all students. Increasingly attention of practitioners and scholars alike has turned to consider who will lead our schools as we move forward into this new century. In a survey of 176 superintendents, Whitaker (2001) found that 39.8% of superintendents reported a “moderate” shortage of principal candidates and 50% reported a “somewhat extreme” or “extreme shortage” of principal candidates. Whitaker (2001) also found that the superintendents perceived a decrease in the quality of applicants with 29 percent rating the quality of the candidate pool as being “poor” or “fair” and 51% rated the quality as “good.” Only 20% of superintendents rated the principal candidate pool as being “very good” or “excellent.” Despite these alarming numbers there remain districts that have continued to enjoy relatively robust applicant pools over the past 10 years.

In a study by Roza (2003) for the Wallace Foundation it was determined that, “quantitatively, it is hard to make the case that a broad and widespread ‘shortage’ of school principals exists or is likely to develop in the immediate future”(p.40). However, Roza (2003) also concedes that for some districts the shortage is real (over a third of districts reporting candidate pools of 6 or less) and becoming worse. Over a 10-year period the schools reporting the greatest shortage also saw their candidate pools shrink by as much as 50%. The importance of understanding how these trends play out in Arkansas is critical for shaping future education reform.

The last attempt to assess the principal shortage in Arkansas came at the beginning of what many predicted would be a massive turnover in school leadership. In a 2000 survey of 248

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Arkansas school superintendents 69% characterized the quality of the candidate pool in their most recent secondary principal search as inadequate. By comparison only 2% reported that the number of qualified applicants for the principalship was more than adequate (Love, 2000).

Despite these strong negative characterizations about the depth of candidate pools for the principalship there were stark differences among schools of differing characteristics and between geographical regions of Arkansas, both in terms of the nature and motivation of the applicants, and the perceptions of superintendents. This study will explore and identify the factors identified by teacher leaders as the reasons they eschew a career in school administration.

Review of the literature

Despite a fairly stable supply of candidates in close to 2/3rd of schools, 75% of superintendents report they are experiencing a leadership shortage (Roza, 2003). The disparity in responses may point toward an increasing frustration with the quality of the applicant pool more so than the quantity at many schools. It is unclear whether this perception has resulted from a change in the candidates themselves or a moving target of expectation about the role of the principal and the skill set they are expected to have to be successful. One in three school district human resource directors reported that the evolving emphasis on working with traditionally low-performing students has made it difficult to find candidates with the experience and skill set to improve student performance (Roza, 2003). Superintendents also defined a “qualified” candidate for the principalship as one with skills well beyond simply being certified and 80% of superintendents reported that finding a “qualified” principal “was either a moderate or a major problem” (Roza, 2003).

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When superintendents were asked by Roza (2003) to identify the most important skills they are looking for in school building leadership two in particular are far and away the most critical. The top five skills identified by superintendents are listed below and are preceded by the percentage of respondents who ranked that skill as the most important or second most important:

1. 98% - Ability to motivate staff and hold them accountable for results
2. 90% - Ability to execute a school improvement strategy
3. 9% - Ability to minimize conflict at school level (among teachers and parents)
4. 6% - Ability to use money to effectively further improvement goals
5. 1% - Responsiveness to central office demands

When superintendents were asked to rank order the experiences they would expect principal candidates to have that would be most important predictors of success Roza (2003) reported the following results with the number preceding each experience representing the percentage of respondents who identified the experience as the most important or second most important:

1. 91% - Leadership experience with professional colleagues
2. 42% - Conflict resolution: managing competing interest
3. 35% - Teaching experience
4. 21% - Curriculum experience
5. 15% - Resource utilization: using resources effectively and efficiently

The pipeline looks different by grade level as current elementary assistant principals are almost twice as likely to pursue a principal position as high school assistant principals will seek the principalship (65% to 34%). Principals identified stress (91%) and time required at work (86%) as the top deterrents for people who choose to opt out of school leadership after they have met the credential requirements. Other issues identified as a “primary barrier” by over 50% of

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principals were low pay (67%), accountability mandates (64%) and 54% pointed to increasing disrespect from students (DiPaola & Tschannem-Moran, 2003). Another aspect of the lack of desirability for the principalship is the pressures inherent in state and federal reforms such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Cusick (2003) believes that there is a difference between the responsibilities that principals face by “educational reforms” and the immediate task of running the schools and addressing the strong desires of parents. Cusick states that “this means the principal often has to chose between spending time on instruction or spending time with students” (p. 4). Not all educators credentialed to serve as an administrator may necessarily be well suited for the job. When asked to consider educators who were eligible to work as school administrators but were not currently working in a school leadership position and speculate as to why, DiPaola and Tschannem-Moran, (2003) reported poor fit for the job almost as frequently as the issue of long hours and stress as keeping good candidates away from school administration. Specifically, 48% reported that the license holders not working as administrators lacked the “disposition or temperament” for the job while 38% cited “poor judgment or common sense”. These findings speak directly to the importance of looking at candidate pools more closely. Simply counting the number of applicants in the pool who meet the experience and credential qualifications is not as telling as exploring how many of those applying for jobs are ready to lead effectively.

There appears to be a drop-off in attempts to find an administrative position two years after certification. More than 60% reported their job search lasted two years after becoming certified with only 10% persisting beyond six years (Lankford et al., 2003). Half of the non-administrators surveyed applied for two to five jobs, 25% for only one job and over 10% continued to apply for over ten jobs. Over 90% reported advancing to an interview at least once.

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One-third of all non-administrators report they have been offered at least one job and turned it down, with men citing salary as the primary motivation for rejecting the job offer, followed by personal reasons with women reversing this order (Lankford et al., 2003). These are critical data for understanding the nature of the principal shortage. The combination of school districts passing over younger leadership candidates and the likelihood of credentialed leadership candidates dropping out of the search process each successive year after earning their certification has contributed to:

1. the aging of the school leadership profession,
2. the declining overall experience of qualified candidates in the job pool,
3. a glut of untapped leadership talent still working as public school educators, and
4. the perception, if not reality in some locations, of a leadership shortage.

It is also possible that passing over potential leaders early in their career has a waning effect on candidates' perceptions of how desirable they find the job. Pounder (2001, p. 46) found that the strongest predictor of both attraction to the principalship and intention to apply is the perceived likelihood they will be offered the job.

The majority of non-administrators holding certification have stopped applying for jobs as their interest in leadership diminishes each year after completing their certification. When you add together those that never looked and those that have stopped, almost three-quarters (73%) of all those under the age of 50 who are certified to be school administrators and are still employed as public school educators, have stopped applying for administrative jobs (Lankford et al., 2003). If we added to these data, the number who hold certification but have dropped out of public education altogether, the number would rise significantly. The three primary reasons potential leaders drop out of the candidate pool are undesirable working conditions, stress, and inadequate

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compensation. These indicators hold steady across gender, age and years spent attempting to secure a job under the age of 50 (Lankford et al., 2003).

Although few current school leaders report that they are satisfied with their current salary or the long hours required to be effectively do their job, there are some encouraging signs. For example, 88% reported that if they had to do it all over again they would still become a principal, and 85% of non-administrators would be willing to throw their hat in the ring if the situation were right (DiPaula & Tschannem-Moran, 2003; Lankford et al., 2003). So there are clearly some sources of satisfaction that not only keep veteran school leaders in the job, but also would compel them to walk the same path again if given the choice. When asked to report on the aspects of the job they find most satisfying it is clear that relationships are the key. Rapport with teachers, students, parents and peers were clearly the most satisfying experiences in the principalship. Rapport with students was the top rated by current principals, gaining an 85% satisfaction rating (DiPaula & Tschannem-Moran, 2003). These findings are particularly salient in light of the shifts in time spent on tasks discussed earlier. Time spent with students and teachers were identified as the tasks principals are most likely to spend significantly less time doing while paperwork and emails led the way in stealing principals' time away. According to the results of the DiPaula and Tschannem-Moran study (2003), principals are increasingly being pulled off of the tasks that bring them the most satisfaction and spending more time on tasks they find least satisfying. Moreover, principals report that the nature of their positions often leaves them helpless to create the change they feel is needed for the students under their care. Only 55% in the DiPaula and Tschannem-Moran study (2003) believe they have the level of authority required to make decisions that need to be made and 63% feel they have either limited or no influence over policy imposed on them from the district office. When all of these limitations and

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demands are considered together, 66% of current principals feel they lack both the time and personnel required to meet their expectations of an effective instructional leader.

Despite correlations between the depth of candidate pools and a variety of school characteristics like salary, student population and working conditions, little is known about the effect of various incentives on leadership recruiting and retention. Not all attrition from the principalship is negative and so in a study of why people leave leadership positions, Papa (2007) first identified the reason and eventual landing spot for people who left administrative jobs. Using a sample of 4044 school administrators Papa tracked their mobility after four years of service and found that 46.4% of them were still working at the same school as a principal while 5.4% remained at the same school but had taken another position. Additionally, 14.5% of school principals left their job within four years to take another position within the same district, with a little over half of them staying in the principalship. Among those leaving their district for another position (11.6%) most did so to take another principal job (7.1%) bringing the total number of school leaders who stay in the principalship after four years, either at their school or another, to 61.4%. This means that over a third of principals leave the principalship within four years, but of even greater concern is that 22.1% of principals leave the education system altogether during that time (Papa, 2007).

Methodology

The survey instrument was designed to better understand perceptions and motivations of teachers that influenced them in their decision to eschew the principalship and other administrative positions. Surveys were sent in November, 2008 to all 245 school districts in Arkansas. The school superintendents were asked to distribute the surveys through their school

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site principals. The school building administrators were asked to identify, “those people who are leaders at your school and have the personal and professional qualities that would make them outstanding school administrators, but they have chosen not to go into school administration. In fact, they may have stated to you that they would never want to be a school administrator.” There were 391 teachers who responded from 139 different school districts. Given the large number of responses, as well as a broad distribution from throughout the state, the teachers who responded for this study should also be highly reflective and representative of teachers who established themselves as school leaders but have chosen not to move into careers in school administration. The study addressed specifically the factors which most discourage teachers from becoming school principals.

The survey questions addressed 11 factors that would discourage teachers from seeking a career in administration. These factors were defined in a 1998 Educational Research Study Report (ERS). The ERS study had respondents rank the major factors on why they felt teachers did not want to pursue careers in school administration. Teachers responded using a five point Likert Scale. The five point scale was chosen to show both ranking and the range in responses. For example, the items ranked third and fourth might be viewed as being close in importance if only a rank was viewed. However, there might be a large gap between them which could mean that item three was much more important than item four. This could not be determined if only rank ordering was utilized. Additionally, an open ended question was included to allow respondents to elaborate on any item they believed was not covered by the survey.

The major focus of this study was on teachers in the state of Arkansas who are identified by their site principal as having strong leadership potential and in fact would make good school administrators, but have stated openly that they do not want to become school administrators.

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The teachers were asked to list their teaching level such as elementary, middle, or high school. They were also asked to identify their school size, location (rural, urban or suburban), as well as their current assignment. In analyzing the assignments, it appeared that there were two distinct groups and that the data could be disaggregated by these two groups. The first group is comprised of what, for purposes of this study, are referred to as “regular classroom teachers.” Regular classroom teachers who defined their job with descriptors such as “third grade teacher, high school social studies teacher, middle school math teacher,” or any other assignment that could be defined as a regular school classroom teaching assignment. The second group of teachers is referred to as “teachers with leadership responsibilities.” These teachers had duties and responsibilities that went beyond the scope of a “regular classroom teacher” such that the teacher has assumed varying degrees of additional leadership. These positions would include such jobs as “athletic director, reading recovery teacher, math specialist, librarian, counselor,” and other jobs that are beyond the normal duties of a regular classroom teacher.

Analysis of the Data

The first question was to determine the factors that teachers identified as being the reason(s) they have chosen not to become school administrators. The respondents were asked to select from 11 factors:

- Continuing bad press/public relations problems for districts place too much pressure on the principal.
- Difficult to satisfy demands of parents and/or community.
- Inadequate funding for schools.
- Job generally too stressful.
- Job is less satisfying as it was in the past.
- Openings not well publicized.

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- Salary/compensation not sufficient as compared to responsibilities.
- Societal problems (poverty, lack of family support, etc.) make it difficult to focus on instruction.
- Concerns about job security.
- Testing/accountability pressures too great.
- Too much time required.

The respondents were asked to rate each item on a five point Likert Scale with one point being “No Impact” and five points being “High Impact.” Therefore the highest score would be the most important factor with the lowest score being the least important factor.

The number one factor that teachers chose for not becoming a school administrator was “Testing/accountability pressures too great” with a score of 3.72 for all teachers. Following closely as the second most important factor was “Job generally too stressful” with a score of 3.70. For the rest of the scores and rankings see Table 1.

It is of interest that the top five items with a score above 3.0 all deal with stress or pressure related factors. Whether it is testing and accountability, the direct perception that the job is too stressful, there is a demand on time that is too great, societal problems make things difficult, or that it is difficult to satisfy the demands of parents or community, each of these areas involves a stress and pressure that is placed on the individual in an administrative role, specifically the principal. When one looks beyond these first five items it should be noted that the gap in the score drops .50 points from 3.12 to 2.62 for “Salary/compensation not sufficient as compared to responsibilities.” This .50 drop is the largest interval drop between any of the factors and appears to or could be construed to divide the top five factors from the bottom six factors. Based on the results as broken out in Table 1 it would appear that the perception that the job is just too

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stressful is the single largest factor in deterring those teachers identified as leaders or with leadership potential from becoming school administrators.

Teachers' years of experience was examined to determine if there was a difference between teachers as they moved through their career. Although the survey was distributed by principals, with no specific direction given regarding for years of experience, there was an even distribution of teachers based on their years of experience. The data included in this study represent a wide range of teachers based on experience with no specific experience level being extremely out of proportion. This distribution can be viewed in Table 2.

To determine if there was a difference in the way teachers at various stages of their career viewed the reasons for not becoming a school administrator an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used as a statistical treatment. There was agreement among all experience groups except in three areas: "Too Much Time Required, Societal Problems Make It Difficult to Focus on Instruction, and the Job is Less Satisfying As It Was In the Past." The results of the reasons broken down by years of experience can be seen in Table 3.

On the factor of "Too Much Time Required" there was a broad spread on scores with the least experienced (and assumed youngest) teachers scoring this factor at only 2.99 while the most experienced teachers scored it at 3.65 and the teachers with 11-15 years of experience gave it the highest score among the experience groups with a 3.67. From a statistical perspective this difference was statistically significant at the .001 level of confidence.

On the factor of "Societal Problems Make It Difficult to Focus on Instruction," the scores ranged from a low of 2.67 among the 6-10 years of experience group to a high of 3.51 with the

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16-20 years of experience group. This difference was statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence.

On the third factor, the “Job is Less Satisfying As It Was In the Past,” the scores ranged from a low of 1.83 among the 6-10 years of experience group up to a high of 2.92 among the 16-20 years of experience group. This variation was statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence.

The next demographic area in which the survey results were broken out was based on gender. Did men and women view the reason for not becoming a school administrator differently? The results are recorded on Table 4 which shows the variations among the genders. From a statistical perspective there was no difference in how men and women viewed the reasons for not becoming a school administrator with the exception of “Job Generally Too Stressful.” The men scored this item at 3.13 while women scored the item at 3.88. For women this was the number one reason for not becoming a school administrator and for men it was the second ranked reason. It should be noted that “Testing/Accountability” and “Job Generally Too Stressful” are rated in the top two by both men and women. On this single area of “Job Generally Too Stressful there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups at the .001 level of confidence.

The next area in which the results were broken down was based upon school type. Did teachers at the elementary, middle and high school levels view the reasons for not becoming an administrator differently? There was agreement in all areas except two areas where there was a statistically significant difference: “Testing/Accountability Pressures Too Great” and “Job

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Generally Too Stressful.” These results are recorded on Table 5 which illustrates the scores of the three school organizational levels.

The high school teachers scored “Testing/Accountability Pressures Too Great” with the lowest score at 3.49, the elementary teachers had the highest score of 3.93, with the middle school teachers scored between at 3.60. On this item the difference among the groups was statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence. It should be noted that the elementary score of 3.93 is the highest score recorded not only on this particular item but on any item in this study. This high score among all groups illustrates how accountability and testing pressures have impacted teachers at the elementary level.

When it comes to the area of “Job Generally Too Stressful” the high school teachers again gave the lowest score at 3.45, the elementary teachers had the highest score at 3.92, and the middle school teachers scored between the other groups at 3.54. On this item the difference among the groups was statistically significant at the .001 level of confidence. As with testing and accountability pressures, the score of 3.92 was the second highest score recorded in any area of this survey and has a score only one-hundredth of a point behind the high score recorded by elementary teachers on “Testing/Accountability Pressures Too Great.” This finding indicates the significance of these two items in impacting the elementary teachers' reasons for not becoming school administrators.

The respondents were asked to add any additional areas that were not covered in the 11 identified reasons which stated; “Please write in a reason that has been left off and should have been included.” Of the 391 teachers who responded to this survey, 138 teachers added a comment into this section. An analysis of the responses shows that the vast majority of the

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respondents wrote in items that could have been included within the top five items listed in Table 1. The majority of comments dealt with the stress of the job and the overall duties that principals are expected to perform. Comments such as the following were common:

“Principals are pulled in so many directions it appears to be a very stressful juggling act.”

“Principals must deal with an unhappy group of students, parents and teachers. When I see my principal dealing with mainly problems, it makes me very happy to be teaching!”

“The state places too much accountability on schools rather than the student’s parents. Principals are blamed for things that are beyond their control.”

“Mainly deal with parents who are angry, teachers who are upset and children who have misbehaved. Duty morning, noon and night. Not enough hands-on work with children.”

“I enjoy positive interaction with students. Principals rarely have positive interaction.”

There were a few comments about a lack of administrator preparation programs in the area or the time it would take to be licensed as a school administrator as a barrier. The overall joy of teaching was mentioned by fourteen respondents who expressed their desire not to leave the enjoyment they derived from teaching in the classroom. Almost as a counter to the joy of teaching was a desire to avoid having to deal with student disciplinary issues. A total of 15 respondents expressed that dealing with student discipline was a reason for not becoming a school administrator. One respondent summarized most comments by stating, “Discipline of students or abilities to discipline students not supported well by parents” was a reason for not being a school administrator.

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Table 1 shows a very high degree of similarity between the “regular classroom teacher” group and the “teachers with leadership” responsibilities. There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups on any factor listed. In summary, both groups of teachers were in agreement.

The teacher respondents were given an opportunity to elaborate and/or explain why they selected specific items and gave them a score of five points. They could define specifically what they meant when they gave a score of five and listed that item as being of “High Impact” and to explain why they have chosen not to enter school administration. The respondents were given approximately one-third of a page for this answer, but they were asked to explain “in a few words” to allow for a more streamlined analysis.

There were 275 responses from the 391 total respondents who elected to elaborate on the reasons they had identified items as “High Impact” for not becoming a school administrator. The majority, roughly 65% of the respondents, wrote comments that would fit into the top five reasons identified in Table 1. The comments when tallied showed a pattern supportive of the statistical findings with “Testing/Accountability” being the most commented upon area, with “Stress” being the second most explained area, followed by “Time” and “Societal Issues.” In many instances it was difficult to categorize a written response clearly under one specific area. The respondents would often write comments that touched upon multiple areas. For example a respondent might comment upon the stress and time demands of being accountable.

The most often explained area was “Testing/Accountability.” However, it should again be noted that testing/accountability, stress, and time all experienced a strong inter-relationship. Testing/accountability were often mentioned as the cause of stress and the reason that time

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demands were so great. Based on the responses it is easy to see how these areas serve as a package of deterrents which discourage people from becoming educational administrators.

In the area of “Testing/Accountability” there were several mentions of the No Child Left Behind Act. There were numerous references to testing and the pressure those tests place on both teachers and administrators. Illustrations of these responses include:

“The State of Arkansas has placed too much emphasis on just raising “test” scores, and in my opinion has gotten away from the basics which students need to be productive in society. If a sub-group does not do particularly well in an area it comes back directly to the principal.”

“Administration has to deal with too broad a scope of the whole school. The principal is the fall guy in some situations.

“In the current world of “no child left behind” we are judged on the basis of test not students. It puts too much pressure to ‘teach to the test’ and measures this as our only success standard. Principals are held ultimately responsible.”

“No Child Left Behind calls for ‘perfection’ in scores by 2014. We do not live in a perfect world. It would be great and our duty to try but it is not realistic.”

“Too much time is put on to have the school test scores high when, in reality, the principal has little or no impact on how well a child does. The principal cannot get “rid of a teacher who is not performing, nor can the principal force parents to do their jobs. Yet, it is the principal who takes the brunt of criticism for poor test scores.”

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The factor of “Stress” ranks a very close second to “Testing/Accountability.” In reading the responses it is hard to separate these two factors. Illustrative comments by teachers about the stress on the principal are reflected by the following comments:

“I feel our administrators are under intense stress. Pleasing ALL parents and employees is impossible. Stress comes from a variety of sources: bus problems, testing accountability, staff differences, etc. It seems as though concerns are everywhere they turn – grocery store, ball games; someone always wanting them to talk about the issues.”

“The job is overall, very stressful. Much of the day is spent dealing with upset students and parents. Many decisions must be made quickly yet the impact of these decisions is long term”

“The demands placed upon administrators to demonstrate leadership, high test scores and the accountability to teachers, parents and community is just too stressful.”

“I received my master’s degree in administration in 1999. As I look/observe my administrator I see how overbearing and stressful her job seems to be. I see her vast array of responsibilities that she has to take care of each day and it seems very stressful and scary. It seems as if she has so many tasks to accomplish but yet no assistance.”

“Entirely too much responsibility place on 1 to 2 individuals. Requires too much additional time away from family. Administrators have a very difficult time dedicating the required time to instructional duties, due to the abundance of demands in trying to manage non-instructional duties. The non-instructional duties are quite overwhelming.”

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“I’ve seen administrators that were stressed to the point of having serious health problems. The pressure/accountability is on the principal more than the regular classroom teacher when the results of spring testing are released.”

“Since I have taught for several years with different administrators, I have witnessed first hand the extreme job stress that occurs in this position. I honestly have no desire to experience that stress.

The demand for “Time” placed on the principal was repeatedly mentioned. Again, there is a definite relationship between time, accountability and the stressful demands of the job. Several respondents mentioned the need to spend time with their family as a major time concern. Teachers are quick to point out the time demands they face with lesson preparation, grading papers and working additional time with students. Therefore, it is interesting that a profession that often expresses concern over the time demands of their job would rank time demands upon the principal so high. The comments seem to recognize that teaching certainly demands time, but the principalship has a time demand level that is beyond reasonable. A typical example of teacher comments regarding time demands would be:

“Being an administrator requires much more of a time commitment outside of the school day. This schedule is not conducive for a parent of small children at home. Principals must attend many extra curricular activities outside the school day, too much of a time commitment for someone with small children.”

Comments on “Societal Issues” were the fourth most often mentioned area which again, is consistent with the statistical results listed in Table 1. Representative examples of these comments include:

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“More and More students are entering school burdened by societal issues. Parents lack of respect, behavior issues. Principals are often ill-equipped to deal with these issues and have no way to help teachers who are challenged with so many issues.”

“We see students daily who are concerned about where they are going to sleep that night and what they are going to eat. We have students entering kindergarten who come from chaotic homes without books or any enrichment. The burden is placed entirely upon teachers and administrators to bring these students to proficiency in spite of the huge obstacles that come with some students.”

With 65% of the responses categorized under the top rated areas listed in Table 1, what are the other 35% of the responses? Oddly, very few respondents mentioned the items from Table 1 that had a score below 3.0. This also appears to indicate that the factors that scored above 3.0 and those that scored below 3.0 have a definite separation into upper and lower tier reasons. For example, salary was mentioned a few times but almost always in the context that “the compensation is not adequate given the time demands and pressure of the job.” There were a wide range of additional responses which had to deal with items that were not specifically part of the surveyed areas. These responses could best be described as expressing individual concerns about issues not particularly covered under this study. One such example illustrates many of the factors covered in this study however it does not specifically address the role of administration or specifically the principal. The example states:

“Poverty and lack of family support have a major impact on our students. These issues are not often taken into account when test data is analyzed. We work very hard to differentiate instruction; we should work just as hard to differentiate how we look at test

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scores. The testing/accountability pressures are definitely too great and only seems to become more magnified each year. We continue to show progress, as our test scores continue to go up. However, we are not meeting the gains mandated by AYP, so we are given no credit for what we have accomplished.”

Other areas emerged and were consistent with the open ended opportunity afforded in Question 1. Discipline was an area that was mentioned in about 10% of the responses, however, it was usually mentioned in the context of being a job stress factor. This was typified by one teacher who responded:

“For me the main reason is discipline. Parents have so many problems...The job is so stressful with problems to deal with everywhere. Our principals stay late and work on weekends just to get all the work done because they can’t do it during the day because of dealing with discipline.”

Several teachers, approximately 7%, mentioned their love of teaching and their desire to remain in the classroom. However, in most instances they also mentioned reasons why they didn’t want to be in an administrator before commenting on their love of teaching. One response that was typical of these respondents stated:

“I do not like working under a lot of pressure. I do not like conflict. I like being a classroom teacher.”

The rest of the responses showed no easily definable pattern. After a thorough review of the comments it was clear that teachers felt strongly that “Testing/Accountability, Stress, Time, and Societal Issues” are the main reasons that teachers identified as school leaders choose not to take the next step in leadership and move into school administration.

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Throughout this survey the teacher respondents shared their personal reasons for not entering school administration. The concluding question was: “Is there anything you would like to share with us about the reason(s) you feel other people may not choose to move into administration?” The purpose of this question is to gain their insight in a more global way. This allows the respondents to offer more general opinions based upon what they might hear from friends or even faculty room conversations.

A total of 166 respondents chose to write their opinions in this section. In most cases they gave personal responses instead of referring to “other people.” The analysis of the responses was more difficult than previous open ended questions as the respondents seemed to use this question as their concluding statement. Very few responses dealt with one specific element as they have been defined through this report. In most instances multiple reasons were woven together. An example, which is representative of this pattern put together the factors of stress (“overwhelmed”), time, discipline, and compensation.

“Watching administrators, they seem to be overwhelmed with paper work. Time is needed to be able to be in the classroom observing their teachers. Discipline is also another issue that seems to strap principals. Many have state that the pay does not compensate for the hours of a good principal.”

An effort was made to define the elements that had been previously mentioned. Stress was overwhelmingly the number one factor present in most answers. Even though “Testing/Accountability” has been ranked almost equal to stress throughout this study, in this section the factors of stress and time overwhelmed testing/accountability by a margin of almost four to one. Numerous other factors were introduced in this area including such items as

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“difficulty in meeting everyone’s demands, political games, lack of support, discipline, and compensation.”

An area that was mentioned more frequently in this section was a desire to remain in the classroom and work with students. In other areas of this study there were only a few comments on this factor. One explanation might be that the respondents were thinking in terms of the parameters of this question and shared not only their opinion but the reason they felt other teachers didn’t consider a career in school administration. The following two comments reflect this position:

“Some people just love to teach and be in the classroom.”

“I feel many teachers just don’t want to leave the classroom. Teaching is a challenge and for some of us that is hard.”

An area that had not appeared before was the area of school “politics.” Issues such as, the hiring of friends or not hiring the best candidate because of favoritism was also mentioned. Additionally, lack of support or respect for administrators, specifically principals, was mentioned. Although these factors were not high frequency areas, they did receive enough responses that they warrant mention. Examples of these comments are:

“Too much politics between school administrators and influential people in the community.”

“I’ve seen a lot of petty stuff, fighting, accusations and other non-educational activity in administration. I’ve seen lots of disrespect for administrators from all fronts. But I also believe, good ones are needed and we’d love to undo those stereotypes and trends.”

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“Sometimes getting a job can be very political”

“It’s lonely at the top. Lack of administrative support.”

“I think the fact that your teachers, who are under your care, that don’t like or respect you, can bad mouth you, put you down to others, etc. and keep their jobs is a little disheartening. I can’t think of any other job where the workers (teachers) can go uptown, bad mouth their bosses (admin.) and still show up and get a paycheck.”

Overall, the factors of stress, time and accountability/testing were mentioned in almost all responses, either directly or indirectly. These three factors posed a common theme with stress and overwhelming time demands being the major factors. All other issues were minimal in comparison to these three factors. A sampling of responses illustrates this significance.

“The main reason I haven’t chosen to go into administration and the reason I feel others don’t chose to move is because of time. Being a teacher alone consumes so much time that I don’t feel adding to those responsibilities would be a very wise decision.”

“Watching administrators, they seem to be overwhelmed with paper work. Time is needed to be able to be in the classroom observing their teachers. Discipline is also another issue that seems to strap principals. Many have state that the pay does not compensate for the hours of a good principal.”

“Pressure on building level (principal) to perform on test scores and above all the time factor. Many teachers with small children at home will not go into administration due to time demands.”

“Today the principal has to be four to five people rolled into one. The job has changed a lot. Students and parents have changed. The job is very difficult and the pay is not equal to the job.”

“I feel the stress that principals feel (being pulled in several directions) is a big reason people don’t move into administration. I know that for me personally, I love education and being an educator. I have always worried that becoming a principal I would get too far away from that. Being bogged down with duties of business and such would divert my attention from the true “business” at hand.”

“The stress associated with being a principal is so high. A principal is required to wear so many hats throughout a typical day. Which include, parent, teacher, nurse, counselor, etc., and that is only in dealing with students and staff. A principal must also deal with schedules, hiring, data collection, writing reports, budgeting, etc. On top of this you have the added accountability for testing and bringing up test scores.”

“I feel the stress that principals feel (being pulled in several directions) is a big reason people don’t move into administration. I know that for me personally, I love education and being an educator. I have always worried that becoming a principal I would get too far away from that. Being bogged down with duties of business and such would divert my attention from the true “business” at hand.”

“I feel the number one reason teachers don’t become administrators are pressure and stress. It is hard enough getting through all the responsibilities that a teacher has. I think people are afraid of becoming burned out.”

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“I feel being a principal is a highly stressful job. Our principals work overtime, all the time, and usually it is a thankless job. I feel many teachers, like myself, feel the stress and effort are too much.”

“Administration is very demanding and a high stress job situation. Administrators spend too much time dealing with complaints and not enough time on education.”

“Undue stress because of excessive emphasis on test scores is probably a strong reason why people are not choosing to go into administration.

Responses from teachers to the question of why more people don't pursue school leadership Positions included dealing with unhappy parents, unhappy children, unhappy staff members, paperwork, discipline, lack of respect, school politics, and testing and accountability. The common factors that seem to be critical in discouraging teachers from seeking positions in educational administration are stress and the demand of time to do the job well. To best illustrate this point two final quotes are offered:

“I knew ten years ago I really wanted to be a principal and felt as though I would be effective. The amount of forms, paperwork, personal, parental and student issues can be overwhelming. I just didn't see what the incentive would be to have more stress and be less able to help the children.”

“I have thought about administration through the years and feel as if I possess leadership potential; however, the changes in the educational field make me hesitant to take the plunge.”

Discussion and Conclusion

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Most studies have focused on teachers in general and even teachers who are in administrative training programs to try and identify the factors that lead people to eschew a career in school administration. This study surveyed people who had leadership potential and in some cases had leadership roles at their school site, yet did not want to go into school administration. The study surveyed people who are best situated to become our future leaders and ask them why they had chosen not to pursue the next step in leadership. In other words, why are the people who should be entering school administration choosing not to do it? Even though this study identified a unique group, the responses were similar to other studies. The top five reasons for not becoming a school administrator were, in rank order:

1. Testing/accountability pressures too great.
2. Job generally too stressful.
3. Too much time required.
4. Societal problems make it difficult to focus on instruction.
5. Difficult to satisfy demands of parents and/or community.

When viewing the data and the highly consistent comments made by the teachers, the conclusion of this study is that teachers are choosing not to enter school administration because of the stress, time demands, and pressure of the job. Much of this stress is a result of the current testing and accountability system which did not exist 15 years ago. However, none of the top five reasons should be taken as an individual item. The teacher responses leads to the conclusion that all five items should be viewed as a totality as they all seem to inter-relate with each other as stress factors. Teachers view the principalship as extremely stressful and with unrealistic time demands. Put succinctly, the teachers in this study, teacher leaders, did not feel the job was

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reasonable or that they could be effective given the current climate and circumstances in which they would have to work.

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Table 1

Reasons Against Becoming a Principal
 All Teachers, Regular Classroom Teachers and
 Teachers in Leadership Roles

Reasons Against Becoming a Principal	All Teachers	Regular Classroom Teachers	Teachers with Leadership
Testing/Accountability Pressures Too Great	3.72	3.78	3.63
Job Generally Too Stressful	3.70	3.74	3.65
Too Much Time Required	3.48	3.51	3.44
Societal Problems make it difficult to focus on instruction	3.18	3.14	3.25
Difficult to satisfy demands of parents and/or community	3.12	3.16	3.06
Salary/Compensation not sufficient as compared to responsibilities	2.62	2.55	2.74
Inadequate Funding for Schools	2.53	2.55	2.48
Job Is Less Satisfying as it was in Past	2.38	2.26	2.41
Continuing bad press/public relations problems for district place too much pressure on principal	2.34	2.37	2.28
Concerns About Job Security	2.03	2.09	1.93
Openings Not Well Publicized	1.67	1.68	1.65

Table 2
Number and Percent of Teacher Respondents
by Years of Experience

Years of Experience	Number	Percent
0-5	69	17.5
6-10	76	19.3
11-15	86	21.8
16-20	63	16.0
21-25	46	11.7
26 and Up	54	13.7
Total	394	100.0

Table 3
Reasons Against Becoming A Principal
 Mean Scores by Years of Experience

Reasons Against Becoming a Principal	0-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	16-20 Years	21-25 Years	26 + Years
Testing/Accountability Pressures Too Great	3.61	3.46	3.93	3.81	3.74	3.81
Job Generally Too Stressful	3.57	3.51	3.84	3.84	3.59	3.87
Too Much Time Required***	2.99	3.41	3.67	3.73	3.48	3.65
Societal Problems make it difficult to focus on instruction*	3.04	2.67	3.27	3.51	3.37	3.37
Difficult to satisfy demands of parents and/or community	3.19	2.96	3.21	3.32	2.89	3.04
Salary/Compensation not sufficient as compared to responsibilities	2.35	2.42	2.81	2.81	2.74	2.65
Inadequate Funding for Schools	2.55	2.37	2.60	2.79	2.28	2.50
Job Is Less Satisfying as it was in Past*	1.99	1.83	2.56	2.92	2.30	2.80
Continuing bad press/public relations problems for district place too much pressure on principal	2.25	2.21	2.29	2.73	2.26	2.32
Concerns About Job Security	1.97	1.91	2.00	2.38	2.07	1.89
Openings Not Well Publicized	1.78	1.62	1.65	1.87	1.59	1.52

*** ANOVA Sig. Difference < .001 level

* ANOVA Sig. Difference < .05 level

Table 4
Reasons Against Becoming A Principal
 Mean Scores by Genders

Reasons Against Becoming a Principal	Male	Female
Testing/Accountability Pressures Too Great	3.34	3.84
Job Generally Too Stressful***	3.13	3.88
Too Much Time Required	3.06	3.61
Societal Problems make it difficult to focus on instruction	3.01	3.23
Difficult to satisfy demands of parents and/or community	2.74	3.23
Salary/Compensation not sufficient as compared to responsibilities	2.52	2.66
Inadequate Funding for Schools	2.29	2.60
Job Is Less Satisfying as it was in Past	2.40	2.37
Continuing bad press/public relations problems for district place too much pressure on principal	2.05	2.43
Concerns About Job Security	2.09	2.01
Openings Not Well Publicized	1.69	1.68

*** Sig. Difference < .001 level

Table 5
Reasons Against Becoming A Principal
 Mean Scores by School Level

Reasons Against Becoming a Principal	Elementary	Middle	Secondary
Testing/Accountability Pressures Too Great*	3.93	3.60	3.49
Job Generally Too Stressful***	3.92	3.54	3.45
Too Much Time Required	3.61	3.48	3.30
Societal Problems make it difficult to focus on instruction	3.24	3.33	2.97
Difficult to satisfy demands of parents and/or community	3.19	3.04	3.08
Salary/Compensation not sufficient as compared to responsibilities	2.73	2.56	2.51
Inadequate Funding for Schools	2.59	2.47	2.48
Job Is Less Satisfying as it was in Past	2.33	2.53	2.35
Continuing bad press/public relations problems for district place too much pressure on principal	2.42	2.10	2.37
Concerns About Job Security	2.03	1.99	2.08
Openings Not Well Publicized	1.67	1.67	1.71

*** Sig. Difference < .001 level

* Sig. Difference < .05 level (.002)