TEACHER PREFERENCES FOR ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL SITE ADMINISTRATIVE MODELS

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Public school teachers with high leadership potential who stated that they had no interest in being school principals were surveyed on their attitudes about six alternative school site administrative organizational models. Of the 391 teachers surveyed, 53% identified the Co-Principal model as the preferred school site administrative structure. In order of preference were the Co-Principal model, the Principal/Business Manager model, the Multi-Principal model, the Principal/Associate Principal model, the Principal Teacher/Principal Administrator model, and the Principal/Educational Specialist model. Among teachers at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels, the only significant difference was on the Multi-Principal model, which was favored more by middle and high school teachers than by elementary teachers. The findings suggest that teachers who had previously reported a lack of interest in becoming school principals might be interested in the position if the organizational structure of the school site were different from the traditional organizational model.

Keywords: co-principal; school site administration; school site organization; school administration alternatives

The school principal plays a pivotal role in the success of a school and is the key person responsible for the maintenance of a high quality educational program (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Edmonds, 1979; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Reynolds & Teddlie, 2000). According to Loeb and Valant (2009), the principal is the critical individual in a school and the key to success for any reform effort or other school improvement initiative. Despite the critical importance of the principal position, fewer people are choosing to leave the teaching ranks and become school principals based in part on the fear that their job satisfaction would decrease and their personal life would be negatively impacted (Winter, Rinehart, & Munoz, 2004). Several studies have reported a shortage of principal applicants at a time when the job is becoming more demanding, complex, and important (Bell, 2001; Cusick, 2002; Guterman, 2007; Whitaker, 2003; Winter, Rinehart, Keedy, & Bjork, 2004). According to Carnine, Denny, Hewitt, and Pijanowski (2008), teachers elect not to become principals because of the extreme stress, unrealistic time demands, and the excessive pressure associated with the position. Given the shortage of candidates for the principalship and the generally negative perceptions that teachers have about the position, one possible solution is to restructure the duties of the principal to make the position more attractive to teachers who have the potential to be quality school site leaders.

According to Cannon (2004), the school site administrative structure must be reexamined or school districts will not be able to attract high quality applicants or retain high quality incumbents. Cannon stated:

> The research revealed that…a fundamental rethinking of the principalship is necessary and that such momentous change requires nothing less than a paradigm shift. The new paradigm would be based on sharing leadership rather than on a hierarchical approach. It would have structures that are flexible and customized to the local needs of the school and school community. Learning would be central and a work/life balance would be essential, for all principals. The new paradigm would also offer flexibility to encourage women to both take up, and remain in, the principalship. (p. 4)

According to Whitaker (2002), school district leaders must look for ways to alter the job of the school principal and decrease the time demands of the current position. Hirsch and Groff (2002) concluded that the principal's job should be re-organized so the job responsibilities are re-distributed.

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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Given the need to re-examine the traditional school site administrative structure, this study identifies alternative school site administrative structures and explores the dispositions of teachers who were identified as being in one of two distinct groups: teachers with strong leadership potential and teachers who have leadership potential while also serving the school site in a leadership capacity that does not require administrative certification. The group surveyed for this study had been identified as individuals who had clearly stated that they had no interest in becoming school administrators or principals. The teachers were surveyed to determine if an alternative administrative organization would make them more likely to change their current position and consider becoming a public school principal. This study identifies and explores six alternative school organizations to determine which administrative organizational structure would be preferred by teacher leaders and teachers with strong leadership potential.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The principalship is often a very isolated position. The standard format for school administrative organization is usually a principal with an assistant principal. It is often perceived that larger middle and high schools may have more than one assistant principal. However, this perception is in many cases not grounded in fact. According to Protheroe (2008), 91% of elementary schools with enrollments under 400 do not have an assistant principal. For schools between 400 and 600 students, the number of schools without an assistant principal decreases to 64%, and for schools with over 600 students there are still 27% that do not have an assistant principal to provide support to the principal.

Shortage of Principals and Stress

In a study of principal transiency in Arkansas, Carnine et al. (2008) found that, for schools at all grade levels, 50.7% of schools had experienced a change of principal in the prior three years. The change of principals was most pronounced at the high school level where 62.7% of principals were replaced over the three-year period. Johnson (2005) summarized the reasons why principals quit their jobs. The reasons included an entrenched faculty that made it difficult to bring about change; the extremely heavy workload with the excessive number of hours demanded by the job; the large number of employees principals were expected to supervise; bureaucratic impediments such as district office directives and union contracts; irate and unsupportive parents; and student discipline issues that were complicated and emotional.

The job of the principal is becoming extremely complex and requires a higher degree of skill than in past decades (Archer, 2004). Pounder and Merrill (2001) reported that because of the increasing demands placed upon principals there is a shortage of teachers who aspire to become principals. Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, and Petzko (2003) reported that there is an image of the strong school principal who shoulders all the burdens of running the organization. They felt this image comes from a traditional view of labor-management, with the principal sitting at the top of the organization. The effective schools movement perpetuated this almost super-human view of the principalship by concluding that all good schools have high quality principals (Edmonds, 1979). Grubb and Flessa (2006) stated that the principal is "responsible for hiring and perhaps firing teachers, coordinating bus schedules, mollifying angry parents, disciplining children, overseeing the cafeteria, supervising special education and other categorical programs, and responding to all the stuff that walks in the door" (p. 519).

The time demands and overall workload of the principalship are contributors to a shortage of applicants. Flessa (2003) reported that the principalship is often an impossible job that isolates the principal, who is already overwhelmed with job requirements that make it difficult to focus on the instructional program. Kochan, Spencer, and Mathews (1999) found that women were twice as likely as men to identify an overwhelming workload as a major reason for not wanting to be a principal. A later study by Carnine et al. (2008) found that women rated the stress of the principalship as the number one reason why they would not want to be school principals. Although the male respondents ranked the same item as their second choice, the difference between the male and female respondents was statistically significant at the .001 level. Yerkes and Guaglianone (1998) reported that non-instructional job tasks are the major source of stress for principals and often result in their resignation. The duties and functions of the principal can also create stress when there is not a clear definition of what teachers and parents view as the role of the principal. Winter, McCabe, and Newton (1998) found that elementary and middle school teachers favored principal

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positions that were focused on instructional leadership, while high school teachers preferred principal position that focused on school management.

The salary levels of the principalship are often viewed as not commensurate with the demands of the job. Protheroe (2008) found that elementary school principals, although satisfied with their job, felt the salary was not commensurate with the duties and reported, as well, that the time demands of the job and the work load were excessive and the overall stress factors were extreme. Principals believed these factors will make it difficult to recruit good candidates for the position in the future. According to Goldstein (2002) the shortage of principal candidates is compounded by legislation that holds the principal more accountable. He explains that the termination, or the threat of termination, of principals in under-performing schools is counter-productive when there is a shortage of principal candidates and no one waiting to take the vacant positions.

A lack of support at the school site is another contributing factor to a shortage of principal applicants, and the possibility of an elementary school principal getting additional help is remote. According to Protheroe (2008), the average elementary school principal does not have an assistant principal, and it is unlikely that the district office will assign additional support personnel to make the job more manageable. Protheroe found that "in 1958, 87% of the supervising (nonteaching) principals reported they did not have an assistant principal. In 2008, two-thirds of the respondents reported they had no assistant principal in their building" (p. 6). Barnett (2001) studied a selected group of beginning principals in Colorado and found that the major challenges facing new principals included absorbing a massive amount of information in a short period of time, trying to be a change agent while facing resistance, and trying to prove their competence to others. In most cases the principals felt isolated and alone at their school site. The shortage of school principal applicants, based on the pressure, time demands, and sense of isolation of the position, might be addressed by further examination of alternative school site administrative organizations.

Need for Alternative Organizations

Chapman (2005) reported that the job of the principal has become increasingly difficult with recent educational reform mandates contributing to the complexity. These changes require principals to have training that prepares them for a new and more complicated role. Chapman states that "there is a need to adopt new approaches to conceptualizing the role of principal and alternative strategies for redesigning and restructuring positions of leadership across the school" (p. 8). Grubb and Flessa (2006) strongly supported alternative school site organizational models as a way to alleviate growing pressure on the solo principal. They supported alternative administrative organizations by stating that, "given the pressures on schools, we can anticipate ever-worsening conditions for principals, increasing shortages of candidates, continued inattention to instructional leadership, and further domination of the rational bureaucratic model with all its flaws" (p. 536). According to Newton and Zeitoun (2001), the extensive menu of skills needed by today's school principal discourages teachers and other potential applicants from considering and applying for the position. In response to the shortage of applicants for the principalship, Newton and Zeitoun stated that "policymakers are challenged to reinvent the role in ways that will increase the size of the applicant pool" (p. 3).

Restructuring a school's administrative organizational structure requires broad-based support reflective of the realization that change from tradition is difficult. Schools must have the authority and autonomy to take action for improvement. Newmann and Wehlage (1995) stated: "The school needs the discretionary authority to act according to the staff's best professional judgment, with minimum interference from bureaucratic directives or political pressure that can undermine rather than promote, the intellectual quality of student learning" (p. 37). As a way to change the job and role of the principal, Johnson (2005) proposed an alternative by identifying the need to "find ways to reduce the workload, such as appointing 'partner' principals or providing stipends to teachers to take on certain managerial tasks" (p. 23). The appointment of an equal partner principal would reduce the burden and demands of the job and allow each "partner principal" to focus their energy. According to Norton (2002), the job description of the school principal must be re-examined and the position must be restructured to allow the principal an opportunity to focus on instructional leadership. A study by Protheroe (2008) determined that the alternative school site organizational model that separates administrative and instructional duties between two people is currently in use in about 8.0% of elementary schools, with 4.1% of elementary schools reporting that this organizational pattern is being considered. When asked if this alternative organization was being considered for their district, 88.0% of elementary principals

reported it was "unlikely to happen in the near future" (p. 157).

Alternative School Site Administrative Organizations

While faced with increasing time demands and stress factors that make the job difficult for one person, the principal must still be an effective leader. In attempting to define how schools could have more effective school site leadership, Cannon (2004) stated that "four areas emerge from the literature as possible ways of responding to the challenges impacting the principalship; namely, building capacity, sharing leadership, frameworks for building leadership capabilities, and alternative models of principalship" (p. 73). The efficacy of an alternative organizational model must examine whether the model improves conditions in the workplace that insures more applicants are attracted, job retention is increased while turnover is reduced, minorities and underrepresented groups are attracted to apply, instructional leadership results in increased student achievement, and more time is available to supervise instruction and provide professional development (Zeitoun & Newton, 2002).

Cannon (2004) developed five alternative models of leadership that could be applied to the school site setting. The five designs identified included

- Supported Leadership (A), a business matrix model;
- Supported Leadership (B), a distributed leadership model;
- Dual Leadership with split task specialization;
- Dual Leadership with job-sharing; and
- Integrative Leadership - a two-principal model with responsibilities integrated (p. 72).

Zeitoun and Newton (2002) identified six alternative models that could be utilized to restructure the traditional school model consisting of a principal and an assistant principal. The six models included

- the Co-Principal model;
- the Principal/Business Manager model;
- the Multi-Principal model;
- the Principal/Associate Principal model;
- the Principal Teacher/Principal Administrator model;
- and the Principal/Educational Specialist model.

The six alternative models for school site organization identified by Zeitoun and Newton (1999) can be described as follows:

The Co-Principal model. In this model there are two principals. One assumes responsibility for instructional leadership and the other for management-type activities such as buildings and grounds. Another organization might be that one principal assumes responsibility for instruction and the other is in charge of student services. Budgeting, staffing, community relations, and supervision would be shared. An assistant principal at large or secondary schools would be in charge of athletics, counseling, and discipline issues.

The Principal/Business Manager model. In this model the duties are split, with one person being the business manager dealing with all non-instructional duties. The principal then focuses on all instructional leadership issues and personnel issues related to licensed staff members.

The Multi-Principal model. This model, designed for larger schools, especially high schools, has a chief principal, a curriculum principal, and four grade-specific principals. This model allows the chief principal to focus on long-range plans, expanding the academic program, and working with teachers from each subject area to share best practices. The grade-level principals stay with their class for all four years and take responsibility for all aspects of their educational experience.

The Principal/Associate Principal model. This model uses a principal in charge of instructional leadership and an associate principal in charge of all management issues an operations. This model also calls for a separate budget director.

The Principal Teacher/Principal Administrator model. This model calls for a principal teacher and a principal administrator. The principal teacher has responsibility for hiring and other personnel decisions, as well as for technology and other student achievement issues. The principal administrator is responsible for plant management, transportation, food, secretaries and custodians, scheduling, data collection, and parent involvement, and is accountable to the principal teacher.

The Principal/Educational Specialist model. This model provides an instructional specialist whose role is to take over many instructional leadership duties focusing on improving instruction among teachers. In smaller schools, the educational specialist may be assigned two schools and will alternate between the two schools.

Of the alternative organizational models identified, the Co-Principal model appears to be the most popular. Grubb and Flessa (2006) identified 10 schools with alternative administrative organizational models and found that eight of the schools used the Co-Principal model. Of the other two schools, one had a rotating principal who held the job for three years, and the second school was small enough they had no principal and the teachers divided up the duties of the principal. Flessa and Grubb reported that respondents liked the Co-Principal model because it reduced isolation and provided them with someone to talk to and share concerns and frustrations. Given the popularity of the Co-Principal model as the desired alternative organizational structure, the leadership of the school must still be assumed by the principal (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). However, the work of the principal can be broken up, with responsibilities distributed to other school staff members. The Institute for Educational Leadership reports that "some schools have found such approaches for distributing discrete leadership roles among individuals other than the principal highly effective " (p. 5).

METHODOLOGY

This study solicited the recommendation of school site principals from throughout the state of Arkansas to identify teachers who possessed strong leadership potential, yet had clearly stated to the principal, by words or actions, they had no desire to become a school principal. The intent of this study was to identify teachers who had the potential ability to be good school principals, but who had chosen against that career path. Through this process, the identified teachers were then disaggregated into two groups: classroom teachers with strong leadership potential, and classroom teachers with strong leadership potential who had already assumed leadership roles on the school campus. The additional leadership roles included leadership of student government, advising, lead teacher, literacy and math specialist, athletic director, coach, and other leadership roles above and beyond their classroom duties that did not require administrative certification.

The process resulted in the identification of 391 teachers responding from 139 different school districts. Although all 245 school districts in Arkansas were not represented, the large number of respondents and a review of the districts from which they responded may be viewed as providing a reasonably representative sample of the state as a whole. Of the 106 school districts not accounted for in the study, 53 school principals responded that they did not have a teacher at their school that met the desired criteria for this study.

The survey instrument utilized the six alternative models for school site organization identified by Zeitoun and Newton (2002) because the six alternative models appeared to provide options that were realistic and had a high potential for actual implementation. The teachers identified themselves as elementary, middle level, or high school. The teachers then responded to each of the six alternative models using a five-point Likert scale where 1 was "no interest" and 5 was "highly interested." Each alternative model included a brief description of the model to insure the respondent clearly understood the parameters of the model. Respondents were directed to mark the model and score it a 5 if the model would make them highly interested in becoming a school principal and a 4 if the model would make them interested in becoming a school administrator. Scores of less than 4 would reveal a diminishing interest.

RESULTS

By gender, the sample was 76% female and 24% male. By community type, 55% taught in rural schools, 28% in suburban, and 27% urban. By grade level, 49% taught elementary, 27% taught middle level, and 30% taught secondary. Of the responding teachers, 39% were identified as having leadership responsibilities, and 61% were regular classroom teachers. Teachers also had a mix of experience levels: 18% had 0-5 years; 19% had 6-10 years; 22% had 11-15 years; 16% had 16-20 years; 12% had 21-25 years; and 14% had 26 or more years.

Teacher ratings of interest in alternative principal models are listed in Table 1. The model with the highest level of interest (M = 3.35) was the Co-Principal Model, the only model with mean ratings above 3.00, the midpoint of the 5-point scale. The Principal/Business Manager Model was second of the six models, with a mean rating of 2.94. The lowest rated model was the Principal Teacher / Principal Administrator Model, with a mean rating of 2.60.

Table 1

Teacher Interest in Alternative Principal Models

Alternative Model		No Interest				Highly Interested	Mean
	N	1	2	3	4	5	
Co-Principal	390	13%	12%	22%	33%	20%	3.35
Principal / Business Manager	388	19%	19%	24%	23%	14%	2.94
Multi-Principal	391	30%	16%	18%	20%	15%	2.72
Principal / Associate Principal	388	21%	20%	27%	23%	9%	2.79
Principal Teacher / Principal Administrator	390	25%	23%	22%	20%	10%	2.67
Principal / Educational Specialist	391	24%	18%	23%	23%	12%	2.80

Statistical tests were also conducted to identify subgroups that gave significantly higher or lower ratings to the alternative principal models. When comparing the means of two groups (males vs. females, teachers with leadership responsibilities vs. those without), we conducted separate t tests for independent samples. When comparing the means of three or more groups (rural/suburban/urban, elementary/middle/secondary, years of experience categories), we conducted analyses of variance (ANOVAs). No significant differences were found in any of the ratings by gender, by community type, or by years of experience. Teachers identified as having leadership responsibilities gave significantly higher ratings than regular classroom teachers on the Multi-Principal Model; on the other five scales there was no significant difference between the two groups. Ratings for the Multi-Principal model also differed significantly by grade level, and a Tukey post hoc test found lower ratings from elementary teachers than from middle level or secondary teachers. On the other five models, ratings did not differ by grade level taught. Ratings for the leadership and grade level variables are detailed in Table 2.

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Table 2

Teacher Interest in Alternative Principal ModesI: Mean Levels by Subgroups

Alternative Model	Regular Classroom Teachers (N = 236)	Teachers with Leadership (N = 152)	Elementary (N = 191)	Middle (N = 79)	Secondary (N = 117)
Co-Principal	3.30	3.44	3.29	3.47	3.38
Principal / Business Manager	2.93	2.95	2.99	2.97	2.81
Multi-Principal	2.60*	2.91	2.45*	2.94	3.03
Principal / Associate Principal	2.75	2.83	2.83	2.62	2.81
Principal Teacher/Administrator	2.69	2.65	2.76	2.59	2.60
Principal / Educ. Specialist	2.70	2.93	2.83	2.70	2.77

Note: * $p < .05$

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The shortage of applicants for school administrative positions and the lack of interest by teachers who would potentially be good educational leaders should be of great concern to educational policy makers. The cause of this lack of interest among teachers is well documented and includes the stress and excessive time demands of the job. It is critical that options be explored to reorganize the structure of the administrative staffing at the school site to reduce the stress and time demands on the principal. This study sought to determine whether an alternative organizational pattern to the traditional principal and vice-principal configuration might prove attractive to potential leaders and make them consider, or reconsider, a career in school administration.

The Co-Principal model was the alternative model favored by elementary, middle, and secondary teachers. This finding is consistent with findings of Grubb and Flessa (2006) that the Co-Principal model was the most desirable. Of the 391 participants in the study, 206 respondents scored the co-principal with a score of either 4 or 5. This might indicate that approximately 53% of teachers who stated they had no interest in being a principal might consider entering school administration if the Co-Principal model were used in place of the traditional administration model.

Although there was a wide variation in scores from the number 1 rated Co-Principal model to the lowest rated Principal/Educational Specialist model, the Principal/Educational Specialist model still received scores of 4 or 5 from 137, or 35%, of the respondents. This may indicate that even for the lowest rated alternative organization, there were still 35% of the respondents who might become school administrators if this organizational model were used.

The current school administrative organization of principal functioning alone or with a vice-principal does not appear to be keeping pace with the demands placed on the principal. To attract a larger pool of potential leaders from the teaching ranks requires that policy makers, school boards, and superintendents look at alternative organizational patterns to reduce the stress and time demands currently associated with the principalship. This study concludes that using an alternative organizational structure to reduce stress and time demands has a high probability of increasing the number of people, especially those with high leadership potential, who would be willing to become principals.

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