ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Joining the Ranks: Opportunities and Obstacles in Obtaining Principal Positions

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Abstract This study examines the application and acquisition process of individuals completing a principal licensure program to obtain school administrative positions over a period of five years. While relatively low compensation and high-pressure accountability demands were viewed as deterrents by those deciding not to seek principalships, the majority of the study participants actively sought and obtained schoool administrative positions. Gender differences were examined in the areas of applying for positions, interviewing, and number of job offers. Reasons for not applying for principal and assistant principal positions were also examined.

Keywords principal recruitment · principal shortage ·
hiring principals and assistant principals · administrative candidates ·
obstacles in hiring administrative candidates

The inability to attract candidates into initial administrative positions such as the assistant principalship and the principalship is a growing concern (Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Educational Research Service, 2000; Shen et al., 2004). Data abound about a shortage of candidates to assume principal positions, especially in urban areas (Educational Research Service, 2000; Rosa, 2003; Whitaker, 2003). The demand for assistant principals and principals is at an all time high due to increased accountability pressures, retirements of current principals, and increased enrollments in many school districts (Malone & Caddell, 2000; Shen et al., 2004). Retirements, particularly, are complicating the issue of shortages. Approximately 60% of all administrators reached retirement age prior to 2000 (Educational Research Service, 1998).

Reasons cited for principal shortages include the stress of the position, long hours, inadequate salary, work environment, criticisms from the external environment, and increased accountability pressures (Carrigan et al., 1999; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Shen et al., 2004). In a 2001 Public Agenda Survey, unreasonable

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demands brought about by higher standards and accountability were given as a major reason principals would leave the principalship (Farkas et al., 2001). It is likely that implementation of No Child Left Behind will exacerbate the problem. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, one study found that the impact of an administrative position on home life impacted teacher's reluctance to enter the administrative ranks as well (Price, 1994).

Diversity issues are also related to principal shortages and availability of candidates for the principalship. While females have made tremendous strides in obtaining administrative positions, particularly at the elementary level, racial disparities continue to be an issue. Sixty-seven percent of urban superintendents viewed increasing the divert of school administration as an area of increasing concern (Educational Research Service, 1998). Superintendents in another study expressed discontent about the lack of minority candidates for principal positions (Whitaker, 2003).

The increasing volume of data pointing to a shortage of individuals to assume principal positions prompted the inquiry described in this article. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the extent to which individuals exiting an administrator license program had actually applied for assistant principal and principal positions, and how many interviews and job offers they had received. The study also gathered data on how many of these individuals were actually in administrative positions after receiving their license from the state, and their perceptions on making the principalship a more viable career choice.

Review of Related Literature

The principal of a school can account for about 20 percent of a school's impact on student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999) and educational researchers have repeatedly identified the principal of a school as the pivotal force in school improvement and increased student achievement over the past 30 years (Brighouse & Woods, 1999; Bryk et al., 1998; Day et al., 2000; Donaldson, 2001; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 1997, 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Sammons, 1999). This evidence makes the question of "who will lead our schools" in the twenty-first century a growing concern, further intensified by indicators, of a shortage of principal candidates in the coming years.

Whether there is or will be a shortage of applicants for principal positions was highlighted over a decade ago by a 1990 NAESP marketing survey that indicated that half of the elementary principals planned to retire by 2000 (NAESP Fact Sheet, 2004). Further studies conducted since that time have yielded mixed indicators on whether a principal shortage has occurred or will occur. The National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) showed a 7% growth in public school principalships and 3% growth in private school principalships between the 1987–88 and 1999–2000 school years, with much greater growth in certain regions, such as the West (Gates et al., 2003). The number of school administrators in an Illinois study showed only modest growth in demand with assistant principalships increasing by 71% between 1987 and 2001 and the number of principals growing by only 10% (Ringel et al., 2004). In 2003, the Center on Reinventing Public Education released a study reporting that the average district received 17

applicants for each principal position, "a modest decline of perhaps two applicants per position over seven years" (Rosa, 2003, p. 28).

In recent years, individual states have documented a shortage of principal candidates. Eighty-six percent of Minnesota superintendents reported in 1998 that filling principal positions was "difficult" or "very difficult" (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000, p. 5), and 90% of districts surveyed in Colorado indicated a moderate to severe shortage of principal candidates (Whitaker, 2003). A survey of superintendents and human relations directors in Michigan reported that the number of applicants for principal positions decreased by 33% to 50% across the state (Cusick, 2003). Further, a 2004 study conducted by RAND found that a 14% and 18% principal turnover rate in Illinois and North Carolina respectively between 1987 and 2001, with no significant changes in turnover rates in 2002 and 2003 (Ringel et al., 2004). Many studies reported the turnover of principal positions to be markedly higher in middle and high schools, as well as high poverty and minority and rural schools (Ringel et al., 2004; Bowles et al., 2000).

Studies conducted by individual states indicate that the supply of individuals who have completed principal licensure programs exceeds the number of job openings. Many of these potential principals do not apply for principalships thus creating a principal shortage. For example, a 1999 Minnesota study found that for every administrator leading a school in Minnesota, there are three additional licensed administrators who do not hold school leadership positions (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000, p. 5). Some studies have found that a majority of certified personnel are not applying for principal vacancies because they are not attracted to the job (McAdams, 1998; Winter et al., 2003). Data are mixed as to whether the number of individuals exiting administrator preparation programs is sufficient to fill current and future administrator openings.

Although states report decreases in applicants for principal positions, several of the studies indicate that the real problem may be with the quality of candidates rather than the quantity of applicants. For example, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) tracked 16 states in their region based on the belief that "every year principal preparation programs in SREB states enroll many individuals who lack the leadership potential and the interest to become principals. Graduates from these programs exceed principal vacancies by several hundred annual in a state" (SREB, 2004, p. 4). An overview of school administrators and their career paths conducted by RAND (Gates et al., 2003) noted that the quality of applicants was highlighted as a concern by hiring superintendents. "They always say we've got a ton of candidates, but then you start weeding them out, and the quality isn't there," observed an Illinois administrator in a study conducted by the Institute of Government Public Affairs (Mulhall et al., 2003, p. 1).

Factors Affecting an Individual's Desire to Apply for Administrative Positions

An overview of the literature provides a glimpse into reasons individuals decide to apply or not apply for administrative positions after completing a preparation program. A recent study by Shen et al. (2004) identified eight factors influencing the application for principal positions. These factors include: (a) workload and compensation issues; (b) macro-constraints of the position; (c) the impact of the position on the individual and family; (d) intrinsic rewards which include the

individual's status within the community, opportunity for advancement, and the degree of position autonomy; (e) work environment; (f) school district characteristics which include district location, size, and reputation; (g) community characteristics; and (h) safety and support.

The nature of the work, long work days, conflict, and criticisms from inside and outside the educational arena, all impact the desire to seek administrative positions (Murphy, 1994; Shen et al., 2000). Further, in an era of increasing accountability, leadership of change is essential but a heavy burden for school leaders. These pressures are likely to increase as schools are held responsible for adequate yearly progress (AYP) of all students under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). State and federal education policies increasingly hold principals directly accountable for student test scores (Tirozzi & Ferrandino, 2000). These stresses are often cited as reasons for deciding not to enter school administrative roles or for leaving them (Murphy, 1994; Whitaker, 1998; Farkas et al., 2001, Winter et al., 2003).

The time demands of running a school are another disincentive for prospective principals (Bowles et al., 2000; Education Research Service, 2000; Olsen, 1999; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). In addition to time devoted to managing micro- and macro-political situations, principals also are responsible for overseeing budgets, recruiting and hiring staff, maintaining facilities, evaluating teachers, disciplining students, and working with parents and the community. At the high school level particularly, attendance and supervision of student extracurricular activities consume many evening hours. A 2001 study by Pounder and Merrill found that only 30% of middle school principals and high school assistant principals sought the high school principal as a career goal, viewing the high time demands as a work feature that made the position less desirable. A study of Illinois principals found that the most negative aspect of the job cited by both practicing (80.7%) and prospective principals (56.9%) was time demands (Mulhall et al., 2003).

Inadequate salaries may also play a role in a lack of desire to enter the principalship (Carrigan et al., 1999; Educational Research Service, 1998; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Whitaker, 2003). Principals are being asked to do far more without commensurate compensation, providing less incentive to leave the classroom for an administrative role. Almost two decades ago, Lortie et al. (1983) found that veteran principals identified two factors that attracted them to the principalship, increased income and greater influence. The study by NAESP/NASSP/ERS (1998) asked the superintendents interviewed to identify factors that they perceived were discouraging from applying for the principalship. The top ranked barrier was "salary/compensation not sufficient as compared to responsibilities" (p. 16). Tirozzi and Ferrandino (2000) summarize the situation many principals find themselves in as follows:

> While principals have advanced degrees, average ten years of classroom teaching experience, and manage huge staffs, they trade their 180–190 day work year for one that exceeds 220 days; take on enormous responsibilities and headaches; lose their job security; and they may earn just a little more or even less on a day-to-day basis than they do as teacher. (p. 1)

In Michigan, a study conducted by the Education Policy Center of Michigan State University found that elementary principals made only $2,000 more than top

teachers in rural districts and eastern suburban districts (Cusick, 2003). The difference in pay increased to $4,000 for western suburban districts, $7,000 for mid state urban districts and topped out at $15,000 for mid-state suburban districts. Middle school principals in the Michigan study were paid between $5,000 and $10,000 more than elementary principals and secondary school principals made between $15,000 and $20,000 more than elementary principals. The study notes that principals also worked between 20 to 40 more days per year than teachers with 10 and 12 hours workdays (Cusick, 2003). The low pay of principals relative to experienced teachers was also highlighted by a study of Illinois principals in 2001 (Strand & Ashby, 2001).

Long hours with ever increasing responsibilities and the need to meet the needs and demands of an ever-widening circle of stakeholders characterize the stress-laden role of the modern principalship. High stakes testing and threats of school reconstitution may make success as a principal difficult and the environment often unstable, if not threatening. The compensation is frequently viewed as inadequate for the demands of the job.

Despite these formidable factors, dedicated educators still undertake the challenge of becoming a principal in order to improve the learning environment of all children. A variety of motivating factors influence teachers to give thought to pursuing administrative positions. Motivating factors include the excitement of the position, the opportunity to work with teachers, the desire to make a difference by affecting the lives of teachers and students, and a change from classroom routines (Shen et al., 1999). Winter et al. (2003) found that opportunity to use one's talents, salary, extra service pay, freedom to make decisions, sense of achievement, opportunity for career advancement, opportunity to serve and give direction to others, and having an impact on the way school policies are implemented created more satisfaction in the principal's job as opposed to participant's current jobs.

Diversity Issues and Application to the Principalship

Of those who are willing to undertake the challenge of becoming a principal, diversity issues may also impact their application to the principalship. A study conducted by the Illinois Education Research Council found disturbing indications of gender and ethnic gaps between principal certification program completers who did and did not obtain or even apply for administrative positions. One study reported that women holding principal certificates are less likely to seek a position than male certificants and 12% more males were hired or offered a position (De Angelis, 2003). Conversely, another study offered that the supply of certified female candidates is not the problem and perhaps is reflected by the fact that 54% of new principals were female (Gates et al. 2003, p. 19). Additional data indicate that female enrollment in educational administration preparation programs has grown, although the number of females in administrative roles remains disproportionate, particularly at the secondary school principal and superintendent levels (Logan & Scollay, 1999; Pounder & Merrill, 2001).

Racial disparities in school principalships are even greater than the gender gap, however. Although minorities make up nearly 18% of public school leaders and 11% of private school principals, this does not reflect the racial composition of the student

population. Interestingly, the highest representation of minority principals is in charter schools (Gates et al., 2003, p. 19). The need for minority education leaders is the greatest in urban centers having minority populations higher than the state average. Sixty-seven percent of urban superintendents see increasing the diversity of school administration as an area of concern (Educational Research Service, 1998). Suburban superintendents are also increasingly concerned about minority representation in school administration as these districts become more racially diverse (Educational Research Service, 1998; Whitaker, 2003). Rural districts that are not racially diverse may not have an immediate need for diversity in school leaders unless they are an area with large migrant populations and students whose primary language is not English. Clearly, there is a need to recruit more minorities into educational leadership preparation programs so that more minority candidates are available to assume administrative positions.

In summary, job demands in the principalship, work overload, administrator retirements, salary issues, under-representation of minorities, and reluctance of some individuals completing administrator preparation programs to seek administrator positions have created a possible crisis in who will lead our schools in the future. Given the increased need to attract and hire high quality leaders in a time of increased accountability and a focus on enhanced student learning, it is imperative that leadership preparation programs recruit and train candidates who have the skills and the desire to assume administrative positions in schools.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study included individuals from a leadership preparation program at a university in a Rocky Mountain state who had completed principal licensure requirements and had applied for a principal license through the state within a five-year period from 1998–2003. One hundred fifty seven surveys were mailed and 98 surveys were returned, representing a 62% response rate.

Thirty-five percent of the respondents were male and 65% of the respondents were female. Ninety-four percent of the respondents were Caucasian, 1% African-American, 4% Hispanic, and 1% Native American. Approximately 30% of the respondents were between 31 and 40 years of age, 42% were between 41 and 50 years of age, 28% were between 51 and 60 years of age, and 1% was over 60 years of age. Eighty-nine percent of the sample reported being married and 11% reported being not married.

Data Collection and Analysis

Survey items inquired about current position held; years of teaching experience; whether respondents had applied for the principal or assistant principal positions since receiving a license and how many times applied; and how many times respondents had interviewed for principal or assistant principal positions. Those responding to the survey were also asked how many job offers they had received for

assistant principal or principal positions and what their future career plans were. Several open-ended questions were included in the survey to obtain more in-depth qualitative information. These questions inquired about changes needed to make the principalship a viable career choice and reasons for not applying for or pursuing the principalship or assistant principalship for those who did not plan to enter these positions. The survey included the demographic questions of gender, ethnicity, age, and marital status. To establish the content validity of the survey, a statistician and several researchers from the field of educational leadership reviewed the survey. Additionally, several principals provided feedback on the survey items.

　　From survey responses, total group scores were tabulated using the descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages. Chi-square analysis was used to ascertain differences among group responses and to determine if significant differences existed among group responses. Responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed according to themes and categories.

　　While the sample size was substantial and the response rate high, the study was conducted in only one state and from one university preparation program, thus limiting the study. The study also used self-reporting by respondents and it was assumed that respondents answered the questions truthfully and accurately.

Findings

The data showed that slightly over 17% of the respondents were still in teaching positions, 28% were assistant principals, 32% were principals, and 3% reported being in the role of Dean of Students. A significant number, over twenty percent, reported being in "other" positions. According to responses, "other positions" included such positions as director of assessment, literacy coach, director of instructional support, coordinator of student achievement, director of curriculum and assessment, director of professional development, teacher on special assignment (TOSA), and reading specialist. One person held an assistant superintendent position and one person held the position of superintendent. Therefore, while over 59% of the respondents were in assistant principal and principal positions, several others were in other administrative positions, and many more were in quasi-administrative positions. Table 1 presents the results of the numbers and percentages of respondents and positions held. Some interesting gender differences were also present in the data. Seventy percent of the male respondents reported

Table 1 Current position

	Male	Female	Total
Teacher	8.8%	21.9%	17.4%
Asst. Principal	32.4%	25.0%	27.5%
Principal	38.2%	28.1%	31.6%
Dean	5.9%	1.6%	3.1%
Other	14.7%	23.4%	20.4%
n	34	64	98

Table 2 Years of teaching experience

	Male	Female	Total
1–5 years	8.8%	6.3%	7.1%
6–10 years	35.3%	21.9%	26.5%
11–15 years	11.8%	28.1%	22.5%
16–20 years	14.7%	18.7%	17.3%
Over 20 years	29.4%	25.0%	26.6%
n	34	64	98

holding the position of assistant principal or principal, while 53% of the female respondents reported holding these administrative positions.

Individuals responding to the survey were also asked how many years of teaching experience they had prior to obtaining the principal's license. These figures also include those in other licensed positions such as media specialists or counselors. Seven percent of the sample had five or less years of teaching experience; 27% of the respondents had between six and ten years of teaching experience; 22% had between eleven and fifteen years of experience in the classroom; 17% had between sixteen and twenty years of experience; and over 26% had more than twenty years experience as a certified teacher. These figures point to a high percentage of respondents who bring many years of teaching experience prior to obtaining a principal's license. When disaggregated according to gender, approximately 25% of the female respondents had over twenty years of teaching experience, while over 29% of the males had over twenty years of teaching experience. Forty-seven percent of the females had between eleven and twenty years of teaching experience, while 26% of males had between eleven and twenty years of teaching experience. Thirty-five percent of the male respondents had six to ten years of teaching experience, while approximately 22% of the females had between six and ten years of teaching experience. Table 2 shows the results of years of experience as a certified teacher at the time the survey was conducted.

Individuals responding to the survey were asked whether they had applied for administrative positions since receiving the principal's license from the state. According to Table 3, more than eighty-two percent indicated they had applied for positions and 17% stated they had not applied for administrative positions. Seventy-nine percent of the male respondents had applied for positions and 84% of the females had applied for positions. Of those who had applied for administrative positions, 31% were between the ages of 31 and 40; 46% were between the ages of 41 and 50; 21% were between the ages of 51 and 60; and one percent was over 60 years of age. The age of respondents appeared to have an impact on whether or not they applied for administrative positions after receiving the license. Approximately

Table 3 Applied for administrative positions

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	79.4%	84.1%	82.5%
No	20.6%	15.9%	17.5%
n	34	63	97

Table 4 Number of times applied for administrative positions

	Male	Female	Total
Never	21.2%	14.1%	16.5%
1–2 times	36.4%	57.8%	50.5%
3–5 times	33.3%	20.3%	24.7%
Over 5 times	9.1%	7.8%	8.3%
n	33	64	97

p < .01

59% of the respondents in the 51–60 age category reported they had not applied for positions after receiving the license, significant at the .01 level (Table 3).

Table 4 shows a further analysis of how many times respondents had applied for administrative positions after receiving the license. Sixteen percent of the total sample reported "never," 51% reported one to two times, 25% indicated they had applied three to five times, and 8% indicated they had applied over five times. When the data were analyzed according to gender, a higher percentage of males reported "never" having applied for administrative positions, and a higher percentage of females stated they had applied one to two times. Moreover, a higher percentage of males stated they had applied three or more times for administrative positions. Table 4 shows the number of times respondents applied for administrative positions according to gender.

For individuals who had not applied for administrative positions since receiving the license, the survey asked why they had not applied for positions. One individual stated that they had worked closely with principals and had witnessed the stresses that impacted school administrators. Other individuals spoke of the discrepancy in salary between their current salary as a teacher and the starting salary of beginning administrators. One individual indicated her husband was already an administrator and they made the decision not to have both in administrative positions for family reasons; several respondents mentioned having small children and family issues. Moreover, several respondents commented they held dean or coordinator positions because they wanted the foundation in discipline or instructional assignments before applying for administrative positions. Others stated they were not ready to leave the classroom yet, or they were already in district positions such as director.

The survey also included a question on the number of times those holding the principal's license had interviewed for administrative positions. Approximately 20% of the respondents stated they had "never" interviewed; about 52% reported they had interviewed one or two times; and about 28% reported they had interviewed

Table 5 Number of times interviewed for administrative positions

	Male	Female	Total
Never	23.5%	19.1%	20.6%
1–2 times	32.4%	61.9%	51.6%
3 or more times	44.1%	19.0%	27.8%
n	34	63	97

N=97
p < .01

three or more times. When analyzing the data according to gender, the data showed that a much higher percentage of females had interviewed one or two times, while a much higher percentage of males had interviewed three or more times. This finding is significant at the .01 level according to chi square analyses. Table 5 depicts the gender breakdown of the number of times respondents interviewed for administrative positions.

The survey asked respondents how likely they would be to accept an interview if the opportunity were presented. Obviously, many respondents already held these positions and others already held administrative positions such as director. Many respondents indicated they were satisfied with their current positions. Seven respondents remarked they were planning to retire soon. Other respondents commented about family obligations and commitments prevented them from desiring these positions. Several respondents indicated they were in assistant principal positions and planned to apply for principal positions in the near future. One individual stated they lacked confidence because of receiving many rejections.

In addition to inquiring about the number of times respondents interviewed for administrative positions, the survey asked how many assistant principal or principal job offers individuals had received since obtaining their license. As shown in Table 6, almost 37% of respondents had not received any job offers, 56% had received one or two job offers, and over 7% had received between three and five job offers. It should be noted that fifteen individuals (15.6%) did not receive job offers because they had not actually applied for positions. Interestingly, three female respondents who had not actually applied for positions indicated they had received one or two job offers. These data likely meant they had been recruited and offered positions, but never officially applied.

The data on job offers were also disaggregated according to gender. As shown in Table 6, forty-one percent of the females had received no administrative job offers and approximately 29% of the males had received no administrative job offers. Fifty-nine percent of the males had received one or two job offers, while 54% of the females had received job one or two job offers. Few respondents reported receiving three or more job offers. A higher percentage of males than females had received three to five job offers. The data show that about 70% of the males had received at least one administrative job offer, while 59% of the female respondents had received at least one administrative job offer. Approximately 63% of the survey respondents stated they had received one or more administrative job offers.

The survey asked about future career plans as these plans pertained to pursuing principal and assistant principal positions. Fifty-six percent of the respondents indicated they were currently an administrator and planned to remain in K-12 administration. Thirteen percent of the total respondents stated they planned to

Table 6 Number of administrative job offers

	Male	Female	Total
None	29.4%	41.0%	36.8%
1–2	58.8%	54.1%	55.8%
3–5	11.8%	4.9%	7.4%
n	34	61	95

N=95

pursue other K-12 leadership positions, but not the principalship or assistant principalship. Only eleven percent reported they planned to remain in their current positions and not apply for principal or assistant principal positions. Respondents were asked if they planned to pursue the principal or assistant principalship outside the state or pursue those positions within the state in the future. Only one percent reported they planned to pursue positions outside the state, while 3% indicated they planned to pursue these positions within the state. Moreover, eight percent stated they planned to retire in one to three years and not pursue administrative positions and 18% reported "other plans." Those reporting other career plans described the desire to remain in the classroom, retirement plans, and the desire to spend time with family. Others mentioned the desire to have roles in staff development and other "quasi-administrative roles."

A final open-ended question asked survey respondents to describe any changes needed to make the principal a viable career choice. Seven individuals specifically commented about salary issues. One person stated, "I would take a substantial cut in pay to accept an assistant principal position at this time which would significantly impact my family." Another commented, "It's an awesome career choice, but working 12–13 hour days for the pay we receive can be discouraging when you're trying to raise kids alone." A third individual remarked, "I make more as a TOSA – it would be difficult for me to accept an administrative position and assume more responsibility for less pay."

Several individuals mentioned gender or ethnicity issues. One person replied, "The prime schools are awarded to white males, while low SES schools are given to minorities." Another respondent stated, "Administration seems like a closed system to me and new folks aren't really given chances to break in. The good ole boy's network is still alive and well. Once you're in a niche in a district, they like to keep you there and not let you grow. As far as getting into another district, it's not what you know, but who you know. Many of us are discouraged."

As already pointed out in this article, several individuals spoke of the difficulty of holding a principalship and having a family, particularly with small children. They commented on the difficulty of balance, but did not offer possible solutions. One person commented, "My priority is my family. An administrative position would take up to 50% more time than my current position, for about the same salary."

The issue of accountability and high stakes testing was mentioned by several respondents. For example, one person stated, "Principals are judged more on results of their school's CSAP tests. I have serious reservations about CSAP – particularly what it measures. Principals seem to have little time to devote to anything but assessment of scores." Another person remarked that the state needed to "ease up on the stress imposed on administrators."

Several respondents made comments related to the quality of the internship component of principal preparation programs. Most statements centered on the lack of quality internships to prepare one for school administrative positions. One individual stated, "There need to be partnerships with school districts to make internship experiences more viable for on-the-job training. Design other experiences to support those trying to enter administration." Others spoke of the need for longer and more intense internships to prepare individuals for the job of principal.

Finally, some respondents shared that they were content in their present school administrative positions and complimented the university program for excellent preparation. Several individuals expressed their desire to move from the assistant

principal position to the principal position. Others remarked that they were ready to move from a quasi-administrative position to an assistant principalship or principalship.

Discussion

It is encouraging that such a high percentage of respondents in this study were already in administrative positions after receiving the principal's license between 1998 and 2003. Over 59% of participants were in assistant principal or principal positions and several were in other administrative positions or quasi-administrative positions. This finding is in contrast to a recent study that found meager job pursuit activity for the principalship among a statewide pool of certified individuals (Winter et al., 2003). Part of the explanation for these positive numbers might be related to the establishment of partnerships between the participating university and surrounding school districts. The principal preparation program and school districts have worked more closely in selecting and training individuals to assume administrative positions (Whitaker & Barnett, 1999).

In recent years, the principal preparation program from which these data are derived has admitted higher numbers of females than males, both on and off-campus. In the study described here, more females responded to the survey than males (65% vs. 35%), similar to a recent study by Winter et al. (2002). Within the past ten to fifteen years females have been increasingly encouraged to enter leadership preparation programs and have made significant gains in obtaining school level leadership positions (Gates et al., 2003, Winter et al., 2003). In a recent study of availability of candidates for the principalship, superintendents indicated a high degree of satisfaction in the quality of female candidates, especially at the elementary level (Whitaker, 2003).

The data indicate that those individuals, both males and females, obtaining the principal license were experienced in the teaching profession. Ninety-three percent of the respondents reported having six or more years of teaching experience, and 26% had more than twenty years of experience. Females had slightly more years of teaching experience than males. This finding is similar to an earlier study by Hite et al. (1994) which found that successful female candidates for administrative positions had more teaching experience than their male counterparts. Given the demanding role of principals in the area of instructional leadership, these data appear positive in that respondents have spent many years in the classroom and would likely have knowledge and skills in analyzing achievement data and improving student achievement, complementing their training in the leadership preparation program. Moreover, these individuals would likely have adequate knowledge of issues related to school culture, supervision, politics in schools, student conduct, and parent relations.

A very high percentage of individuals, 83%, had applied for administrative positions after receiving the license, with slightly more female respondents applying for positions than male respondents (84% vs. 79% respectively). This finding is in contrast to a finding by Winter et al. (2002) that found in one school district, as few as 10% of certified candidates were likely to apply for principal vacancies. It is somewhat surprising that a higher percentage of males than females had "never" applied for administrative positions (21% vs. 14% respectively). A higher percentage of females (58%) than males (37%) had applied one or two times, while

a higher percentage of males (33%) than females (20%) had applied three to five times. These numbers might indicate that females are slightly more likely to obtain positions than their male counterparts.

In regard to age, the highest percentage of those applying for positions were between the ages of 41 and 50, indicating once again that these individuals had many years of experience prior to applying. Only 21% of those applying for positions were between the ages of 51–60, significant at the .01 level. It is not surprising that older individuals would be less likely to apply for assistant principal and principal positions given the demanding nature of the job and the increasing pressures of the job in the area of accountability (Portin et al., 1998; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Older and more experienced individuals might also take a salary cut to move from their teaching positions to an assistant principal or principal position, and are more likely to have retirement plans.

In regard to the question about number of times respondents had interviewed for assistant principal or principal positions, the percentages were similar to the number of times applying for administrative positions, suggesting that candidates were somewhat successful in obtaining interviews after applying. Over 89% of the sample reported interviewing one or more times. A higher percentage of females reported interviewing one or two times, while a higher percentage of males indicated interviewing three or more times. According to chi square analyses, these findings were significant at the .01 level. These data might suggest that females are less likely to pursue applying and interviewing after one or two times.

Despite the finding that a higher percentage of females than males applied for administrative positions, a higher percentage of males were already in assistant principal or principal positions than females (38% vs. 28% respectively). This finding may be due to less encouragement and mentoring of female candidates in some cases, a phenomenon found in previous literature (Hite et al., 1994; Ortiz & Ortiz, 1995; De Angelis, 2003). In the state where this study was conducted, 80% of the superintendents are male. Since superintendents often select principals, it is possible that a degree of gender bias still exists in some school districts. Clearly, the results of the research described here show that the majority of individuals obtaining the principal license and exiting this leadership preparation program strongly desire leadership positions.

Two related open-ended questions were asked of survey respondents, "If you have not applied for assistant principal or principal positions, why not?" and "If you are not planning to pursue the assistant principalship or principalship, what are your reasons?" Responses to these questions were similar. Several individuals reported that their current position met their needs, similar to a study by Winter et al. (2002) where participants cited the greatest impediments to pursuing the job of principal were satisfaction with current job and perceived inadequate authority given high stakes accountability. Others in this study commented on their observations of the stresses that impact school administrators. Five individuals mentioned family issues, either issues related to small children or health of family members. In the Winter et al. (2003) study, participants expected that assuming a principal position would have an adverse impact on their spouses and their job security, making the job less attractive. An abundance of research over the years documents the increased stress and additional responsibilities inherent in the principalship (Education Research Service, 2000; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Increased job responsibilities and stress

coupled with balancing family issues might influence some individuals to forego applying for school administrative positions.

At least four individuals mentioned salary issues as a factor impacting their desire to apply for assistant or principal positions. In some cases, particularly for the more experienced teachers, they would have to accept a salary cut with increased stress and hours for an initial administrative position. Several researchers point out that salary is a significant issue in attracting applicants to the assistant principal and principal roles (Carrigan et al., 1999; Galvin & Sperry, 1996; Whitaker, 2003). Still other respondents mentioned retirement, while several reported they still planned to pursue these administrative positions and were waiting for the right time.

The data pertaining to the number of job offers for assistant principal and principal positions provides interesting comparisons between males and females. Forty-one percent of the female participants had received no job offers, while 29% of the males had received no job offers. About the same percentage of males and females reported receiving one or two job offers (59% vs. 56% respectively). A higher percentage of males than females reported receiving three to five job offers, although these percentages were small. Overall, over 63% of the respondents reported receiving one or more administrative job offers. This finding should be viewed as positive, a majority of candidates are able to obtain positions fairly soon after obtaining the license.

One troubling finding from this follow-up study relates to ethnicity. Only 6% of the respondents reported they were minority, 4% Hispanic, 1% African-American, and 1% Native American. This finding is similar to the Winter et al. (2003) study that documented a very small percentage of minorities held principal certification in one state. In the research described here, only a few minorities were actually in the principal preparation program during the years 1998–2003. Several researchers have documented the need to recruit and train minorities to fill administrative positions in public schools. In a study by Whitaker (2003), superintendents reported that they had few, if any, minority candidates applying for administrative positions in their districts.

One factor that might contribute to whether minority candidates obtain a principal's license is the state exam. The state where this study was conducted requires a state test to obtain a principals's license. In this particular university program, minorities have a greater likelihood of being unsuccessful on the state exam than Anglo candidates, indicating a possible bias.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Several recommendations are pertinent to this study. These recommendations are developed from the results of this study as well as other studies that address the issues of principal shortages, recruitment and selection of principals, and the changing role of the principal.

- Develop partnerships between school districts and universities. Increasingly school districts are finding it necessary to "grow their own" administrators and rely heavily on internal recruitment. Many districts are engaged in partnerships with universities so that the best candidates with leadership potential are selected to participate in leadership cohorts.

- Initiate formal mentoring and intensive internships. During the time individuals participate in leadership preparation programs, they should be assigned a formal mentor during the entire program and internship experience. In addition to mentoring, the internship component of the program should be intensive. Individuals should participate in field experiences during the duration of the leadership program.
- Devise mechanisms to increase diversity. The findings of this study and other studies point to a need to take action to increase the numbers of minority candidates in principal preparation programs and in principalships. Encouraging minority teachers to enter principal preparation programs, providing excellent mentors, and assisting with university tuition will assist districts in expanding their pool of qualified minority applicants. White females have made great strides in entering administrative ranks, continued encouragement and mentoring is needed, particularly in recruiting and selecting females for high school principalships.
- Enhance salaries and incentives for principals. Given comments received by participants in this study and data from other studies, the salaries and incentives for principals must be commensurate with the level of responsibility, especially in such an era of high stakes accountability. Some experienced teachers are reluctant to give up their positions for a principalship because they would take a cut in salary for more responsibility and a heavier workload. It would be wise for school districts to assure that administrative salaries are higher than the highest paid teacher.
- Restructure the role of principal. Ways need to be devised to restructure the job of principal to make it more attractive to applicants. Several strategies have been suggested to restructure the role. Restructuring the role to focus more on instructional leadership, reducing the work week and year, and adding more support services and personnel to assist principals have been recommended (Winter et al., 2002; McAdams, 1998). Superintendents must search for creative ways to reduce the stress and time demands on principals. Hiring more deans, assistant principals, and interns to assist would be helpful. Hiring full time interns in administrator preparation programs might assist principals in fulfilling their many responsibilities.

Qualified individuals who are willing to tackle the challenges facing the twenty-first century principal do exist, as exemplified by the high percentage of men and women in this study who have actively sought and obtained school leadership positions. Targeted recruitment of minorities and the development of supportive structures by preparatory institutions and school districts, such as those outlined above, can increase the number of individuals who seek principalships. While the job of a principal may indeed be daunting in its scope, more teachers may find the challenge of making a difference in the lives of both students and fellow educators more enticing if they feel appreciated and not alone in the journey of school change and leadership.

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