EXAMINING PRINCIPAL SUCCESSION: PERSPECTIVES OF PRINCIPALS AND CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERS

by

EDWIN GLENN BENGTSON

(Under the Direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how one school system experienced succession. The goals of the study were to identify the nature, characteristics, and practices of the succession of principals in the selected Georgia school system through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants.

To examine the experiences of individuals who succeeded into the principalship and the experiences of central office leaders who managed the succession process, a qualitative case study method was used. Six participants were interviewed with four different protocols yielding a total of twenty-four interviews. The protocols explored the practices and experiences of the participants relating to socialization, professional development, supervision and evaluation, and succession. In addition, artifacts and fieldnotes were used as additional sources of data.

The findings of the study reveal that there was a high sense of urgency for succession planning and management embraced by school system leaders in the Barker County School System. While individuals who had recently succeeded into the principalship were challenged by the high expectations of the system and the community, they also experienced a substantial amount of support from central office leaders in meeting those challenges. The Barker County

School System supported succeeding principals by increasing the control of professional and organizational socialization of new principals. Additionally, the system developed evaluation, professional development, and recruitment practices based on the same well-defined competencies. Professional development of principals was viewed as a means of support and was embedded into the daily work of principals. The findings suggest that the large urban system in this single case study displayed practices which were consistent with succession theory as defined by the literature outside the field of education.

INDEX WORDS: Principal succession, Principal socialization, Principal professional development, Principal supervision and evaluation

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# DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Without their support and encouragement, this dissertation would simply not exist. To Janice, my wife, who has been my pillar of support throughout this quest. While some would say, "What a long, strange trip it's been," I say "What a wonderful and exciting journey I have been on for the last four years." You, my wife, have made the trek bearable by always being there and keeping things afloat while I have been buried in classes, interviews, data, and writing. I would not have been able to do this without you. I consider myself a most lucky man to have you as my partner in life.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Who will the next principals be? Will they be prepared for the job? Will they have the skills, competencies, and abilities to be successful in the future? Will they have the opportunity to develop leadership skills for the future? What can be done to insure success in the leadership of our schools? At least one of these questions is asked by students, parents, teachers, central office personnel, school board members, and community members whenever there is a principal vacancy. Such a vacancy leads to the succession of leadership at the principal position.

For the purpose of this study, succession was defined as the movement of personnel from one position to another. Succession involves the process in which an individual moves into a new role that was not held by that individual. In most instances, succession in principal leadership positions occurs as an upward movement within the hierarchical career structure of the organization. However, principals can succeed into another principalship as a lateral move or as a promotion to the central office within the system. Conversely, succession occurs when an individual is demoted as in the case of a principal being reassigned "back to the classroom."

The succession of school leaders is a certainty of human resource activity in school systems. Succession happens, planned or not, anticipated or not. Whether the vacancy is due to retirement, promotion, transfer, dismissal, unexpected circumstance, or people leaving the workforce for another career opportunity, the people with a vested interest in the school are quick to wonder if the new principal will have the necessary qualities to ensure success. This concern is justified as the principalship is considered a key position in any school system

(Cotton, 2003; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstron, 2004).

The influence of school leadership has been debated for the past 25 years, with growing consensus more recently that the position of principal has some control over the success of the school (Dinham, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003). Confounding to be sure, Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) found that principal leadership had a greater impact on student engagement than teacher leadership, and in later research, principal leadership was identified as second only to the classroom teacher in influencing student learning (Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004).

There are questions that remain in the definition of principal leadership, and there are still arguments to be made as to the relationship between what a principal does and how that may affect student achievement (Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003); however, the importance of strong leadership at the principal level has been recognized as a critical component for school improvement (Gruenert, 2005; Harris, 2002; Pounder, Reitzig, & Young, 2002). As a result, principals have been charged with leading instruction and getting acceptable results that are mandated by local, state, and federal accountability systems (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Marks & Nance, 2007; Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008).

Coupled with the realization that there is a significant relationship between the school leader and student achievement is the press to "award professional leadership certification only to persons who have demonstrated the ability to improve curriculum, instruction, and student learning" (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001, p. 2). The heightened standards for school leadership have caused a more selective approach that could potentially result in a smaller pool of qualified candidates (Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009; Pounder & Merrill, 2001).

The changing role for principals reflected in the increased demands for instructional leadership requires professional development for school leaders (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Nicholson, Harris-John, & Schimmel, 2005). Concomitant with the increased accountability placed on schools (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Crow, 2006; Moore & Slade, 1996; Shen & Crawford, 2003), the possibility of a leader shortage has led to an "increasing recognition that preparing and developing leaders cannot be left to chance" (Bush, 2008, p. 307).

In addition to the issue of having effective leadership that influences student learning, there is growing concern over the availability of school leaders as school systems perceive the potential for principal shortages and start thinking about how to prepare for school leadership in the future. The nature of the shortage of principals has been debated among researchers (Pounder, Galvin, & Shepherd, 2003; The Wallace Foundation, 2003).

While the public perceives a shortage of principals, a study by Roza (2003) found that there is not a shortage in the number of applicants nationwide. What Roza suggested was there were geographical areas in which the distribution of potential leaders was not even, particularly in districts where the job quality was perceived to be less than desirable by the average applicant. Similarly, Gates, Ringel, Santinbañez, Ross, and Chung (2003) summarized that "in spite of a stable national picture, individual schools and districts face challenges in recruiting and retaining school administrators" (p. 63). There was not a crisis in the principal workforce, but there was evidence of a dilemma in school leadership for some individual schools and districts, in particular, low-income schools where retaining principals posed a challenge (Whitaker, 2001; Whitaker & Vogel, 2005).

The shortage in candidates willing to take on the challenge of underachieving schools and the dearth of qualified candidates to assume the role of instructional leader in a high-stakes

accountability driven environment has created a dilemma that is faced by any school system dealing with principal succession. The ability to fill leadership positions with qualified people has become a critical aspect to school system leadership. It is the experience of succession that this study addresses.

## Statement of the Problem

Literature on educational leadership is plentiful; however, the literature on the succession of school leaders is sparse. Theories and ideas about leadership—preparation and development of school leaders, management aspects of school administration, community relations, and recognizing cultural issues—abound on the shelves of school superintendents' and principals' book cases and occupy the courses of study in university preparation programs. All of this literature is important; however, while there is growing concern over the principal workforce trends, there is little to no literature on how school systems experience the succession of school principals. There is a large body of literature surrounding the topic of succession of leaders as experienced by organizations (Bolton & Roy, 2004; Garman & Glawe, 2004; Karaevli & Hall, 2003; Pynes, 2004; Rothwell, 2005; Steele, 2006); yet, there has been no literature to date produced on the process of succession as experienced by K-12 public school systems in the United States.

The effects of principal succession have been studied (Fink & Brayman, 2004; Hargreaves, Moore, Fink, Brayman, & White, 2003); however, the nature of succession and how succession of principals is experienced in public K-12 educational organizations have not been explored to date. Ironically, as Hargreaves (2005) explained, "One of the most significant events in the life of a school is a change in its leadership. Yet few things in education succeed less than leadership succession" (p. 21). If there is evidence that a change in leadership can improve or

diminish a school's success, then shouldn't school system leaders be concerned about how they might influence the succession of their school leaders? Succession of school leaders can no longer be a haphazard occurrence, but must be controlled and planned for as much as possible.

## Purpose of the Study

Anticipated or not, there will eventually be a new principal in any given school. The increased awareness of leadership impact, especially in the current accountability environment, has led to concerns about the availability, longevity, and quality of school leaders (Pounder & Crow, 2005). While the concern for the health of the school leadership workforce has been magnified, there has been little research done in the area of succession of principals. It is not known how school systems react or plan for the eventual succession of school principals.

The purpose of this study was to examine how one school system experienced the succession of principals. To further define the study, the system chosen was a large urban system that had experienced growth in student population, increased diversity among the student population, and a continuing need for school leaders due to the opening of new schools and principal retirements. In addition, the selected school system had consistently closed the achievement gap as measured by the state of Georgia's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) mandate. The goals of the study were to identify the nature, characteristics, and practices of the succession of principals in one Georgia school system through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants.

To study the succession of school principals in the broadest sense includes, but is not limited to, the experiences of principals. The succession of an individual leader does not occur in isolation, but instead, is dependent on decisions made by others in leadership positions within the organization. To gain a full understanding of the nature of the phenomenon of succession, the

system practices relating to the selection, hiring, development, evaluation, and socialization must be examined. To examine system practices, the experiences of succeeding principals are a cornerstone for analysis; however, the involvement of central office actors also requires close examination.

This case study examined the experiences that are related to the succession of principals. The researcher was interested in studying how principals experienced succession as recipients of the actions of district level leaders. The process of principal succession in school systems, the components of practice that influence succession, and the challenges that exist in the succession of principals were examined.

This study was intended to assist in the discovery of succession experiences found in a single school system that was meeting the accountability demands in the current educational environment. While there is little to no current literature in the succession process for school leadership, there are resources available in the literature from the business and industry arenas as well as other public sector professions and organizations to help identify practices that are generic to leadership succession across professions.

Rothwell (2005) described the components of effective succession planning for organizations in general as including:

- competency identification for both present and future;
- evaluation or assessment of those competencies; and,
- the development of the workforce to meet those competencies.

In K-12 systems, recruitment and selection practices, evaluation and supervision, and professional development are parallel to Rothwell's components.

## Background of the Study

The demand for effective school leadership has never been more pronounced as it is today (Fink, 2005). As accountability has increased because of federal and state legislation, there has been more attention drawn to the need for more qualified and effective leaders (Roza, 2003). In addition, trends in the principal workforce have raised concerns about the availability of future school leaders who can get the necessary results that accountability standards require (Tucker & Codding, 2002; Vanderhaar, Muñoz, & Rodosky, 2006). While there is a general workforce crisis with increasing retirement figures looming, there is not a shortage of people being prepared to be school leaders; however, there is a concern for the quality of future school leaders (Roza, 2003). The results of a study about school administrator workforce trends offered:

> Our analysis provides no evidence to support the idea that there is a nationwide critical crisis in the ability of schools to attract and retain school administrators, and thus does not argue for nationwide policies aimed at attracting more people into the field of school administration. (Gates et al., 2003, p. xvii)

This study suggested that there is not a shortage of people available to move into administrative roles, a position that was supported by Roza's (2003) study which revealed, "Although some districts and areas are experiencing difficulties finding good school principals, there are far more candidates certified to be principals than there are principal vacancies to fill" (p. 1). The findings of these studies bring forth the questions:

1. Why is there a perception of a shortage?
2. Why are there are more certified people than positions, and yet there seems to be difficulty in getting high-quality principals hired?

Although these questions do not represent the focus of this study, they do offer relevance to the importance of this study about principal succession.

The changing job requirements of the principal could have effects on the desirability of the job as well as the expected qualifications for the job. Research on effective schools in the 1980s led to the principalship becoming a position of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2003). As the accountability movement has gained momentum, the demand for instructional leadership has increased (O'Donnell & White, 2005), creating a job that is much more complex, demanding, and stressful (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Shen & Crawford, 2003). As a result of these changes in the nature of school leadership and the related burdens that are placed on the principalship, more teachers, who may at one time have aspired to be school leaders, are not pursuing the career progression into leadership (Pounder & Merrill, 2001). This failure to move into leadership roles could be a barrier to effective succession of qualified personnel.

The movement of personnel from outside the position into the position is one form of succession. A second succession scenario can be found in the movement of principals from one school to another. Succession experiences of these moves were seen as important because of the effect of changing leadership in schools as cited by Fink and Brayman (2004) and Hargreaves et al. (2003). The need for understanding the experiences of succession when key personnel changes occur is substantial regardless if the movement is a result of promotion or transfer.

## Research Questions

Succession of leaders impacts the future level of success experienced by organizations (Friedman, 1987a; Fulmer & Conger, 2004; Rothwell, 2005). The seriousness of this impact has caused much discussion and attention directed toward how organizations experience the succession of leaders. This emphasis on understanding succession is found primarily in the private sector, with more attention emerging in certain types of organizations in the public sector.

In public school systems, there has been little emphasis put specifically on the succession process; however, there has been considerable attention given to succession of leaders in the literature on the private sector. To gain a better understanding about succession for school leaders, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Which practices related to succession are experienced in one successful school system?
2. How did the school system plan for the succession of school leaders?
3. How did school system control the socialization and development of their school leaders?

## Theoretical Framework

This study addressed the experiences of principals, central office personnel, and superintendents. To illuminate the processes and practices of succession through people's experiences of succession required a qualitative inquiry approach. Qualitative research is a research approach rooted in the social sciences. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005):

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Maxwell (2005) argued that, "the strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and having its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (p. 22).

Like all qualitative research, this study is fundamentally interpretative (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Crotty (2003) described the interpretivist theoretical approach as being one of pursuing an understanding of a phenomenon. This study used an interpretivist theoretical approach to examine the phenomenon of principal succession. The goals of the study are to

identify and interpret the nature, characteristics, and practices of the succession of principals in select Georgia school systems.

## Overview of the Research Procedures

A case study approach was used to capture the complexities of the phenomenon within a specific context (Stake, 1995). The succession of principals was researched using a single case study (Stake, 2006) through an empirical phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). According to Yin (2009), "A case study is an empirical inquiry that

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18).

The study of educational institutions and the phenomenon that occur within the daily events of those institutions must be considered as contextual in nature if there is to be any depth to the gained understanding of succession.

This study used the most common methods of case study procedures including interviews, coding, data management, and interpretation (Stake, 2006). To determine the processes and practices of the school systems, participants included principals that have experienced succession and those central office administrators working with principals in areas that influenced succession. The accounts given by the participants in this study provided the researcher with appropriate textual data to identify and to interpret the practices related to the succession of principals. An understanding of the phenomenon of the succession experience as governed by particular practices was discussed, leading to the findings of practices that may support successful succession of principals.

The single case study was drawn from a larger research study involving four school systems (Zepeda et al., 2009). The research began with an exploration of the literature on principal succession, professional development, supervision and evaluation, and socialization. After reviewing the literature, the research questions were generated in response to the recognized gap in the literature in relation to the nature of succession in school districts. From the research questions, four interview protocols were created, one for each of the following areas: socialization of principals; professional development of principals; supervision and evaluation of principals; and succession of principals. The protocols were semi-structured in nature allowing for the possibilities of spontaneous probes by the researcher. Each of the 6 participants in this study was interviewed 4 times producing 24 transcripts. Once the analysis of the data was complete, the case study was written.

## Significance of the Study

The succession of school principals has not been studied in the context of the nature of the experience of those who succeed and those who manage that succession. With the emerging understanding of the effect of school leadership on student achievement, coupled with the high-stakes accountability that every school system faces, there is a need to address the nature of succession in school systems so system leaders can plan for successful leadership transitions in their schools. This study was also timely given the purported shortage of school leaders and the unknown intended and unintended consequences of recent changes in leadership certification and preparation in the state in which this study was being conducted. Leaving the quality of leadership to chance can no longer be considered an option for school system leaders. This was why this study was significant.

Studies on succession of principals to date have dealt with the effects of principal turnover on school effectiveness. In a quantitative study of the relationship between school climate, structure, student achievement, and student population characteristics, Griffith (1999) found that parents perceived schools with a change in principals as having more discipline issues. In addition, it was found that school with a change in principal often had lower test scores than those schools that had not had a change in principals. Griffith also found that schools faced with an increase of diversity in student population, particularly when there was an increase in lower socio-economic and minority population, the tendency was for there to be higher rate of principal succession.

Fink and Brayman (2004) studied the effects of principal succession in four schools in Ontario. In this study, there was an emphasis on how succession influenced the process of school change. Based on the results of their study, Fink and Brayman recommended that school system leaders plan for succession through linking the recruitment, preparation, selection, assignment, induction, and ongoing development in a coherent future-oriented way.

The present study attempted to address the need to establish effective succession planning by examining how succession occurs in one high-performing school system. While this was a case study with limited generalizability, it provided the emerging understanding of how one school system experienced the succession of principals and how professional development, evaluation, socialization, and recruitment and selection played roles in the succession of principals. By looking at the experiences, beliefs, and practices of principals, central office administrators, and the superintendent, this study might be able to illuminate how a successful system in Georgia experienced the succession of principals.

The findings have the potential to fill a void in the literature related to succession in public school leadership. It is hoped that the findings will identify and explicate specific succession practices that have emerged or are emerging in this system. The findings have the potential to inform superintendents and school administrators about the practices related to principal succession, the barriers to the execution of those practices, and the benefits of those practices when strategically planned.

## Assumptions of the Study

A major assumption of this study dealt with the theories of bureaucratic organizations and organizations as open systems. The bureaucratic nature of schools as organizations suggests that there are typically set ways in doing things (Bidwell, 1965). In public school systems, the professional practices are clearly defined by policies and regulations that either stem from the state or the local board of education. The selection and hiring processes by most human resource departments and professional development and evaluation procedures practiced by central office administrators are often controlled by the policies and regulations that are typical in bureaucratic organizations. The assumption for this study was that the school system was governed by policies and regulations that were in place.

In addition, it was assumed that the school system operated as an open system in the sense that they had contextual needs that were unique to the setting and may have influenced decisions and practices (Morgan, 2006). The external environment in addition to the size, growth, and demographics for the school system may have created a context that had unique demands related to principal succession.

A third major assumption of this study was principal leadership had an effect on student achievement. Coupled with this assumption was the belief that the succession process that

principals experienced played a role in their effectiveness as school leaders; therefore, succession practices could have an indirect effect on student achievement.

Finally, it was assumed that all participants in this study had experienced phenomenon related to socialization, professional development, evaluation and supervision, and recruitment and selection. It was assumed that school system leaders, in particular the superintendent, would be open and interested in discussing the succession of principals. This assumption was based on the fact that given the high-stakes accountability environment, and the recent research that placed the principal as being a major influence on student achievement, superintendents' sensitivity to the quality of leadership in their schools had increased.

## Definition of Terms

To assist in the discussion of the study, key terms were defined to help clarify the contents of text, and to establish a context for the findings. The literature on professional development, evaluation, socialization, and succession provided sources for assisting in defining key terms used in the study.

Competencies – the defined characteristics that are necessary to successfully complete a job. Boyatzis (1982) defined competency as "an underlying characteristic of an employee (i.e., motive, trait, skill, aspects of one's self image, social role, or a body of knowledge) that results in effective and/or superior performance in a job" (p. 82).

Evaluation – the systematic approach to assessing the performance and qualifications related to a particular person in a particular job or professional position (The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Education, 1988).

Professional Development – the continuous and systematic approaches to influencing the professional practices, beliefs, and understandings of school leaders. Professional development

of leaders strives to meet the goals of the organization through improved leadership competencies and skills. Professional development is driven by the identification of needs of both the organization and the individual learner.

Socialization – the process through which an individual learns or acquires the necessary knowledge, skills, and values needed to perform an organizational role effectively (Hart, 1993; Heck, 1995; Morrison, 1993).

Succession – the process of moving through a career path. The process involves the movement of personnel in to or out of positions and is more critical the more pronounced the position. This movement may be the result of promotion, demotion, or lateral movement within an organization, or the hiring of candidates external to the organization.

Successful School System – for the purposes of this study, a successful school system is determined by the percentage of schools within that system that has met the state Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of the state.

Succession Plan – the systematic approach to the succession of personnel thought out in a strategic fashion. Succession plans coordinate human resource resources and practices to ensure the organizational needs are met when personnel changes (Rothwell, 2005; Steele, 2006).

Supervision – the interaction between professional workers that results in the nurturing of professional growth. This interaction can be defined as providing learning and growth opportunities through the nexus of professional development, evaluation, and direct interaction on the job site (Zepeda, 2007).

## Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to a single case with six participants. While the school system studied represented a distinct type of case, a large and urban/suburban district, the case only

represented those systems that were similar in size and demographics. The study's participants, while representing equally both principals and central office leaders, did not include veteran leaders as part of the study. Given the time and resources available for the study, the principals were selected with the recommendation from the system leaders. It was decided that individuals that had recently experienced succession into the principalship would be appropriate for this study. The absence of veteran principals' perspectives was a limitation and could be pursued in a future study.

There are limitations to the study of succession of leaders in large bureaucratic organizations (Grusky, 1961). In the system studied, it was not possible to interview all principals in the system. Only 3 principals out of 105 principals were selected by the district leadership for participation in the study. These principals were all relatively new to their positions at the time of the interviews with time in seat being between 4 and 18 months. In addition to the three principals, three central office school leaders participated in this study. The representation of the current principal workforce was diminished by the limited access and time available to pursue more principal and central office participants.

In addition, the researcher did not control the selection of the principals who participated in the study. The selection of principals was determined through the recommendation of the central office leadership. This was seen as a limitation as it potentially prohibited the researcher from obtaining the perspectives of other principals. Central office leaders selecting principals who would represent the system only in a positive light was a possibility.

## Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 describes the background and rationale for the study, the statement of purpose, and the significance of the study, the research questions, pertinent definitions, and brief

overviews of the research procedures, limitations, and assumptions of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to the succession of principals. Within this review, the topics of socialization, professional development, supervision and evaluation, and succession are addressed. Chapter 3 describes the theoretical framework of the study, the research methods used to address the research questions and a description of how the methods align with the theoretical framework. Data collection, analysis, and reliability and validity measures are reported.

Chapter 4 includes the findings of the case study of the Barker County School System. A thorough description of the case including demographic, student achievement, and participant profile information are presented. In addition, findings are presented from the data analysis with identified themes.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings. Drawing from the literature outside the field of education, a comparison of the succession practices found in the Barker County School System with the established practices related to succession in other fields assists in further clarifying the relativity of the findings to the theory of succession planning.

Chapter 6 offers a study summary. Unanticipated findings and implications for research, policy, practice, and leader preparation programs are discussed.

# CHAPTER 2

# REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how one school system experienced succession. The goals of the study were to identify the nature, characteristics, and practices of the succession of principals in select Georgia school systems through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants.

The guiding research questions were:

4. Which practices related to succession are experienced in one successful school system?
5. How did the school system plan for the succession of school leaders?
6. How did school system control the socialization and development of their school leaders?

While the effects of leadership succession on schools and the types of succession have been studied (Fink & Brayman, 2004; Hargreaves, Moore, Fink, Brayman, & White, 2003), succession planning for school leadership has not been examined. With the call for school system leaders and higher education institutions to address the recruitment, preparation, and ongoing development of a high-quality principal workforce, this study was significant and timely (Chapman, 2005; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Roza, 2003; The Wallace Foundation, 2003).

A qualitative approach employing case study methods was selected for this study to examine and describe how school system leaders plan for the succession of principals. This study

was grounded in seven areas of the related literature presented in this chapter. The areas presented included:

1. Principal Workforce: Supply and Demand;
2. Principal Influence on Student Achievement;
3. Socialization of Principals;
4. Professional Development of Principals;
5. Evaluation and Supervision of Principals; and,
6. Succession of Principals.

The first two sections of the literature review underscored the importance of succession. Understanding the supply and demand of the principal workforce, and how principals influence achievement helped to identify the significance of the study of principal succession. The last four sections of the literature review illuminated the components of practice and experience that framed the research protocol.

## Principal Workforce: Supply and Demand

A review of the literature by Pounder, Gavin, and Shepherd (2003) revealed that there have been reported principal shortages since the 1950s. The cause of the principal workforce shortage was elusive as different perceptions of the problem existed. Pounder et al. stated, "There are multiple independent and interactive factors that may contribute to perceptions or misperceptions concerning an administrator shortage in the United States" (p. 133). One factor contributing to the perception of a shortage in principals could be related to the national trends in the general workforce.

*Principal Shortage*

The U.S. Department of Labor (2007) anticipated shortages in the workforce regardless of the employment field. A report from the U.S. Department of Labor suggested that "The relatively fast growth of the population above traditional retirement age combined with slower growth of younger cohorts are expected to be a severe constraint on labor force growth" (p. 34). The U.S. Department of Labor report reinforced the perception that there was a looming shortage in the workforce for education, including school principals. To start understanding the status of the principal workforce; however, required a deeper investigation into the literature.

The potential increase in the retirement rates of principals has caused concern for the number of impending jobs filled in the future. In one 1998 study, a survey of 403 superintendents found that retirements were perceived as being the major reason for the shortage of principals (Institute of Educational Leadership, 2000). This perception of an impending shortage aligns with the national trend of an aging workforce as highlighted by the U.S. Department of Labor (2007). People in the general population are working longer and not retiring as early as in previous years (Gendell, 2008), potentially creating a greater number of retirements in the future (Gates et al., 2003).

Aligned with the U.S. Department of Labor (2007) findings, the principal workforce was aging (Gates et al., 2003; Petzko et al., 2002). These findings suggested that a higher number of principals were eligible to retire. The U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.) projected an 8 % increase in elementary and secondary administrator positions from 226,000 in 2006 to 243,000 in 2008. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.), "Principals and assistant principals should have very favorable job prospects" (p. 4).

*Supply of Applicants*

The problem of principal shortages appeared not to be the lack of demand, but the lack of supply (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno, & Foley, 2001; Institute of Educational Leadership, 2000; Tracy & Weaver, 2000; Whitaker, 2001, 2003). While prospects were bright for those that aspired to be principals, system leaders perceived the number of qualified candidates who had the necessary skills and abilities as insufficient (Roza, 2003).

In a nation-wide survey of 853 randomly selected superintendents, there were "concerns about the skills of their current principals, and many acknowledged difficulties in finding effective, well-qualified candidates" (Farkas et al., 2001, p. 22). In addition, superintendents expressed concern about the qualifications of their current principals when only 52% of the respondents indicated satisfaction with the quality of their current principal workforce. Farkas et al. found 40% of the superintendents surveyed believed there was "a somewhat serious shortage of principals" (p. 22). Pijanowski, Hewitt, and Brady (2009) found that superintendents revealed that rural systems were "at a distinct disadvantage compared with urban and suburban schools in their search for new school principals" (p. 85).

Whitaker (2001) conducted a survey of 108 superintendents inquiring about the availability and quality of principal candidates. Findings indicated 50% of superintendents surveyed considered the shortage in principal candidates to be either "somewhat extreme" or "extreme" (p. 84). Approximately 28.3% of the superintendents surveyed considered the quality of principal candidates to be "poor" or "fair" while only two of the respondents indicated that the quality of principal candidates was "excellent."

The shortage of qualified candidates was perceived, in part, to be due to individuals not wanting to go into school administrative positions (Roza, 2003; Winter, Rinehart, & Muñoz,

2002). There were reports from several states that indicated the number of people with leadership certificates were significantly higher than the available positions indicating a surplus of potential candidates (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Whitaker & Vogel, 2005).

A study of 198 teachers, 306 principals, and 370 superintendents found a variety of reasons why there was a shortage of applicants for the principalship (Shen, Cooley, & Wegenke, 2004). Shen et al. (2004) identified eight factors that influenced the application process for an administrative position. Shen et al. offered:

> The eight factors include: (a) workload and compensation; (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 districts which include the location, size, and reputation of the district; (g) community characteristics; and (h) safety and support. (pp. 62-63)

Shen et al. drew one significant observation from these findings; that the influences on individual's decision to apply for leadership positions were predominately extrinsic in nature, possibly indicating that the problems in getting individuals to consider applying for administration positions may be originating in the job itself, not necessarily in the applicant pool.

The challenge attracting applicants to the job of principal was particularly evident in urban school systems where schools were having difficulty achieving and maintaining the academic performance required by accountability pressures (Roza, 2003). The Roza study cited school systems with large populations of impoverished students, low budgets, and poor support from the community as having the most difficulty in recruiting principal candidates.

The health of the principal workforce is a concern for human resource coordinators in the matter of staffing—having enough people to fill vacant positions. However, system superintendents share a greater concern for finding quality leaders as they increasingly connect principal leadership with student achievement.

## Principal Influence on Student Achievement

Principal influence on student achievement continues to be debated by researchers (Supovitz, Sirindes, & May, 2009; Witzers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003). Since early in the 20th century, scholars and practitioners have suggested that there was at least a correlation if not a causal relationship between principal behavior and student achievement. Cubberley (1923) indicated the influence that principals may have had on achieving desired results. Certain behaviors were identified that would allow principals to help teachers in their instruction to obtain the desired results of high student achievement. Cubberley (1923) offered:

> The principal now has an opportunity to use organization and adaptation of the course of study to group needs as one means of keeping his teachers thinking and growing, and he will generally do this best by giving them much liberty in making decisions rather than taking it all upon himself. (p. 389)

While Cubberley foreshadowed what is currently known as distributed leadership or shared decision-making, the main importance was the implication that principals could behave in certain manners that could help to improve the chances of obtaining the desired results, and these notions existed as early as 1923.

Almost 50 years later, Alfonso, Firth, and Neville (1981) offered, "Many school functions contribute to the school's overall objective – learning by children – but instructional supervision is directly, consciously, and immediately brought to bear on achieving that goal" (p. 413). Alfonso et al. described school leaders or instructional supervisors as being accountable for school outcomes. This indicated there was a continuing thought process that supported the notion of instructional supervisors (which included principals) had some effect on student achievement.

Over the last 25 years, there has been much attention given to researching the impact of educational leadership on student achievement (Witziers et al., 2003). The following is a review of two major studies that focused on previous studies of the effects of leadership on student

achievement. The first study was a review of studies that occurred from 1981 to 1994 (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). The second study was two meta-analyzes of the findings of 27 published studies from 1984 until 2006 by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008).

The search for an answer to the question of how much influence does a principal have on student achievement is not a new quest. Hallinger and Heck (1998) reported on 40 published journal articles, dissertation studies, and peer-reviewed conference papers presented or published between 1981 and 1994. This review represented studies from eight different countries and all included a clear conceptualization of principal leadership. In all studies, principal leadership was an independent variable, and school performance was a dependent variable.

Some of the studies reviewed looked for direct effects of principal leadership on student achievement while other studies investigated indirect effects of principal leadership on student achievement. According to Hallinger and Heck (1998), "The results of direct-effects studies are surprisingly clear. Researchers adopting this model have been unable to produce sound or consistent evidence of leadership effects on student outcomes" (p. 166).

Other studies reviewed looked at the indirect or mediated effects of principal leadership on student achievement. Hallinger and Heck (1998) reported, "Studies employing a mediated-effects model produced either a mixed or consistently evidence of positive effects of principal leadership on school outcomes" (p. 167).

While there was little evidence of principal leadership directly influencing student achievement, there was a growing recognition that there was some degree of an indirect effect. This finding gave significance to the importance of leadership at the school level and encouraged researchers to explore further to try to identify the specific behaviors and practices of principals that influenced student achievement.

Robinson et al. (2008) performed two meta-analyses of 27 published studies. In both analyses, the researchers concentrated on specific types of leadership. In the first meta-analysis, Robinson et al. focused on transformational and instructional leadership types. Instructional leadership involved instructional goal setting, oversight of teaching programs, and the development of a positive learning culture. Transformational leadership involved the development of a commitment by school personnel to a shared vision, mission, values, and goals. The researchers found through their meta-analysis that "the average effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times that of transformational leadership" (p. 635).

In the second meta-analysis, Robinson et al. (2008) divided instructional leadership into five different leadership practices:

1. establishing goals and expectations;
2. implementing strategic resource management;
3. planning, coordinating, and supervising teaching and the curriculum;
4. promoting and participating in teacher development; and,
5. ensuring a safe and orderly environment.

Through this meta-analysis, Robinson et al. found "strong average effects for the leadership dimension involving promoting and participating in teacher learning and development and moderate effects for the dimensions concerned with goal setting and planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and curriculum" (p. 635). The results of this study strongly suggested that when instructional leadership emphasized teacher development and when principals participated in that development, there was a significant effect on student achievement.

While this has not been an extensive review of the literature on leadership effects on student achievement, the two studies reviewed were the most inclusive reviews and analysis of the published research to date. The reviews have established that principal leadership does effect student achievement; therefore, the way school systems experience principal succession bears attention. The next sections of this review of the literature focuses on principal socialization, professional development of principals, evaluation of principals, and the succession of principals.

## Socialization

For the purpose of this study, the researcher defined socialization as the process through which an individual learns or acquires the necessary knowledge, skills, and values needed to perform a social role in an organization (Hart, 1993; Heck, 1995; Morrison, 1993, Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The acquisition of knowledge and skills are essential to the performance of a worker. While socialization starts in preparing for entry into a position and continues throughout the span of a career, socialization is most critical at the point of entry into a new position (Hart, 1993).

As individuals begin a new job, the organization has a greater influence on their learning and development (Frese, 1982). As individuals become more experienced they are influenced less by the organization, and they exert influence on the organization (Hall & Associates, 1986; Schein, 1978). Therefore, when examining succession it is relevant to explore the organizational socialization of the individual as a significant experiential component. Hart (1991) explained, "Succession and socialization are two sides of the same process involving the same people – the one side focusing on the group's influence on the newcomer, the other interested in the newcomer's influence on the group" (Hart, 1991, p. 469). The process of socialization intertwines with succession, and the degree to which the organization can control the

socialization of an individual could have a potential effect on the outcomes of succession (Van Maanen, 1978; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Van Maanen (1978) argued, "Much of the control over individual behavior in organizations is a direct result of the manner in which people are processed" (p. 35). The importance of socializing or processing personnel as they move from one position to the next is critical. Given the importance of socialization, what can school systems do to ensure the succession of leaders benefits the system by meeting the goals and vision of the system?

To answer the question of organization control and influence on the socialization of principals, examination of socialization experiences that influence individuals aspiring to enter and remain in the principalship is necessary. A review of the literature related to anticipatory, professional, and organizational socialization follows.

*Anticipatory Socialization*

Anticipatory socialization can occur early in one's life experiences. The daydreaming, imagining, and fantasizing of being in a particular profession or job and how that individual would behave in that position is a form of anticipatory socialization (Clausen, 1968). While anticipatory socialization can not necessarily be controlled by the organization, understanding how individuals aspire to the principalship can be helpful in creating socialization experiences for them as they transition into the principalship.

In a qualitative study of the experiences of 23 principals, McGough (2003) positioned that early childhood and early school influences played a significant role in the anticipatory socialization of principals. Of the 23 participants in the study, 22 of the principals reported family and school leaders generally supported them through providing positive educational

experiences when they were students. All of the participants ended up as teachers whether or not they initially pursued that career option.

McGough (2003) found that a majority of the 23 participants in his study pursued formal training to become a school leader because of encouragement from principals. McGough's finding is relevant to principal succession in developing strategies to increase the number of people who have identified leadership potential obtaining certifications. For example, using current principals to identify individuals with leadership potential, and then supporting those individuals through encouragement to pursue formal training may be a useful strategy to assist in controlling the socialization process for aspiring school leaders.

The implication of McGough's (2003) findings highlights the challenge of socializing leaders who have had positive educational experiences into positions where they must understand students and families who may perceive their educational experiences as being negative. While the literature on anticipatory socialization of school leaders is limited, there is more literature related to professional and organizational socialization.

In a quantitative study of 150 first to third year assistant principals, Heck (1995) found that socialization had an influence on leader performance. Heck stated:

> Overall, the study adds to a growing database of studies conducted in a variety of organizational settings that have found that both organizational context and professional preparation affect what administrators do . . . a finding suggesting these variables also affect how well administrators do what they do. (pp. 45-46)

The implications of Heck's (1995) study underscored the importance of understanding how both professional socialization and organizational socialization influenced the job performance of administrators as they transitioned into a new position.

*Professional Socialization*

Professional or formal socialization occurs during the pre-service experience of school leaders during their formal training (Crow, 2006; Hart, 1993; Mullen, 2004). Individuals aspiring to be school leaders obtain the knowledge of the profession's norms and practices through professional socialization experiences. Most often, the bulk of this knowledge acquisition occurs in principal preparation programs through university or leadership training programs.

Browne-Ferrigno (2003) found that only 3 of the 18 participants of a qualitative study examining the development of members of a cohort of students in a university leadership preparation program felt they were ready for an administrative position when they completed the program of study. Additionally, Browne-Ferrigno found that only half of the participants indicated they planned to seek an administrative position on completion of the program. Barriers to entering administrative positions were age, experience, gender, and family responsibilities. Browne-Ferrigno's findings indicated that professional socialization through the traditional preparation programs may not be as effective as needed to lead schools.

In their qualitative study of several leadership preparation cohorts, Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) found that "less than half of the 60 participants . . . indicated that they planned to seek positions as principals or assistant principals within 2 years of completing their licensure requirements" (p. 476). Browne-Ferrigno and Muth observed how their findings relate to the succession of principals, and they summarized, "The composite findings of our research suggest that the disconnected linkage between principal recruitment, preparation, and placement is a critical problem" (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2003, p. 477). Browne-Ferrigno and Muth's study led to the recommendations for an increase in the clinical experiences that were real-life,

supported by mentorship, and strengthened the ties between universities and school districts. These recommendations imply increased attention to organizational socialization is necessary.

*Organizational Socialization*

Organizational socialization occurs when an individual enters a specific position within a specific organization. The cultural norms and values of the organization interact with the tasks of the job. Organizational culture influences how new workers learn and the skills they acquire. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) offered, "In its most general sense, organizational socialization is the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). In the case of principal succession, there is the system organization as well as the organization of the individual school. The degree in which there is a cohesive vision and mission throughout the system would determine where the most significant influence on organizational socialization would originate. If there is a high level of autonomy granted to the schools in a particular system, the norms and values of the individual school's culture influences the socialization of a new principal. The organizational socialization of a new principal can be influenced largely by the system's cultural norms and values when there is a strong and shared vision throughout the system.

An empirical study of the socialization of principals used four dimensions to help describe the experiences of new principals in Canada (Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1994). The dimensions used in this quantitative study were:

1. Relationships (with superordinates, subordinates, peers, students, and self);
2. School system policies, procedures, and control mechanisms;
3. Formal training; and,
4. Outcomes (images of role, skills and knowledge, and norms and values).

Descriptors from theory and past empirical practice were used on each dimension to establish the two ends of a continuum ranging from "not helpful" to "very helpful."

The results of the study revealed that "most aspiring and practicing school leaders experience a 'moderately helpful' pattern of socialization; few experience a uniformly negative socialization pattern whereas 19 percent experience a quite helpful pattern" (Leithwood et al., 1994, p. 157). In addition, respondents reported, "district effects on socialization experiences were very strong" (p. 157), and participants in the later stages of their principalship generally felt their socialization experiences were more helpful to their success than what was expressed by participants at the beginning of their principalship.

These findings have implications for system leaders when dealing with the succession of principals. If school districts are seen as having a strong effect, yet participants are reporting only 'moderately helpful' experiences, then districts may be able to improve the socialization process by addressing the experiences that participants identified as being most helpful.

Participants in the Leithwood et al. (1994) study reported a significant value on the job-embedded experiences once they had decided to pursue a leadership position. Such on-the-job leadership experiences included assuming positions such as department heads, committee chairs, and lead teachers. In addition, having multiple teaching experiences often served as a socialization experience for some participants. The experiences that were embedded in the school life of the individual was reported to be more consistently effective and valued over formal preparation programs.

Crow (2006), in a conceptual paper about the perspectives on principal socialization, supported the notion that the organizational socialization of new principals is often left to chance. Crow posited:

> The typical organizational socialization of beginning principals in the USA follows a format in which the new principal is bombarded with all the responsibilities that a veteran principal has. The lack of mediated entry creates burnout, stress, and ineffective performance as beginning principals develop quick fixes and unreflective practices – responses that are counterproductive to the type of leadership needed in a complex society. (Crow, 2006 p. 318)

Crow suggested that principals, for the most part, are socialized individually, informally, and with little attention paid to what could be learned from their teaching experiences.

The observations of researchers involved with the study of socialization of principals call for attention to the way school systems approach the organizational socialization of new principals (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Crow, 2006; McGough, 2003). The creation of systematic approaches to the socialization of principals could help influence the effectiveness of the succession process, particularly how succession might apply to the principalship. A planned and systematic approach to the acquisition of knowledge and skills to becoming socialized into a new position is related to, and in many ways, parallels the continual acquisition of knowledge and skills found in professional development activities for school leaders.

## Professional Development for School Leaders

Leadership has emerged as the critical linchpin in determining the success of organizations. In complex environments, organizations face challenges "as they ponder how to recruit, develop, and retain high-performance leaders" (Melum, 2002, p. 55). The changing role for principals reflected in the increased demands for instructional leadership in addition to management responsibilities requires strategic use of professional development for school leaders (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Nicholson, Harris-John, & Schimmel, 2005). Coupled with the increased accountability placed on schools (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Crow, 2006; Shen & Crawford, 2003), the possibility of a leader shortage has led to an "increasing recognition that preparing and developing leaders cannot be left to chance" (Bush, 2008, p. 307). Hence, the

professional development of leaders is an important component in the succession process of school principals. The literature related to the content, and program characteristics of professional development for principals follows.

*The Content of Professional Development for Principals*

The development of school leaders must be multi-faceted in content if schools are to be improved. The capacities needed to be an effective school leader include both leadership and management skills, abilities, and knowledge (Cuban, 1988; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008). The necessity for instructional leadership has intensified as accountability for student learning has increased for teachers, principals, and district leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Haar, 2004; Petzko, 2008). Emphasis on the development of instructional leadership is linked to the research on the effect of principal leadership on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson et al., 2008).

Organizational leadership, however, does require management expertise and skills (Day, 2000; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008). Hallinger and Snidvongs (2008) stated, "Developing school leaders who do make a difference, however, requires a management curriculum that is relevant to schools, up-to-date in learning methods, and which draws upon knowledge from disciplines inside and outside of education" (p. 9). When the management and leadership roles are effectively blended with a focus on student learning, successful school leadership results (Cuban, 1988).

Training is most often associated with the learning of management skills, abilities, and knowledge whereas development is most often associated with the learning of leadership skills, abilities, and knowledge. For the purposes of this study, professional development included both training and development with content related to management issues and leadership issues. Day

(2000) helped to clarify the differences between management and leadership development. Day (2000) further elaborated, "Management development is the application of proven solutions to known problems, which gives it mainly a training orientation. . . . a leadership development approach is oriented toward building capacity in anticipation of unforeseen challenges" (p. 582). Clearly, the content of professional development for principals should address both the management and leadership aspects of school leadership.

In an extensive review of research on principal preparation and development programs, Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) identified that "program content should incorporate knowledge of instruction, organizational development, and change management, as well as leadership skills" (p. 8). In addition, Davis et al. (2005) found changes that would help principal development programs be more effective. These changes included:

> developing knowledge that would allow leaders to better promote successful teaching and learning. They also include the development of collaborative decision-making strategies, distributed leadership practices, a culture of collegiality and community, processes for organizational change and renewal, and the development of management competence in the analysis and use of data and instructional technologies to guide school improvement. (p. 8)

Embedded in the findings of Davis et al. (2005) are clear examples of both leadership and management issues that need to be addressed in effective leadership development programs for principals.

Effective professional development addresses the learning of identified competencies. Rothwell, Jackson, Knight, and Lindholm (2005) defined competencies as "a way to describe work-related behaviors that are required components for achieving work results. Competency models speak to results and the kind of person needed to achieve them." (p. 90). In addition, Rothwell et al. stated, "A key point worth emphasizing here is that the competencies essential to one level do not necessarily qualify individuals for advancement – nor does a long tenure with

the organization" (Rothwell et al., 2005, p. 32). A more extreme view on the importance of competencies was expressed by Guinn (2000) who asserted, "The answer is to do succession planning without focusing on job titles but rather concentrating on the key skills and behaviors needed to successfully lead the business to accomplish its competitive strategy" (p. 390). According to Rothwell (2005), competency identification falls into three categories: present competency studies, future competency studies, and derailment competency studies (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

*Competency Typologies*

| Competency Typology | Area of Focus | Competencies Addressed |
|---|---|---|
| Present Competencies | Single department, job category, or occupational group | Competencies for success at the present |
| Future Competencies | Single department, job category, or occupational group | Competencies for success in the future |
| Derailment Competencies | Individuals with poor or failing performance | Competencies that lead to failure or poor performance |

(Rothwell, 2005)

Competencies can be associated with different levels of approaches related to job performance (Rothwell et al., 2005):

1. *Job competencies:* Behaviors that are commonly demonstrated in performing the job and are demonstrated by all performers of a job.
2. *Performance competencies:* Behaviors that are critical to the successful performance of a job that are demonstrated by the highest-level of performers in a job.
3. *Succession competencies:* Behaviors that are common to all jobs in an organization, and strengthened and expanded through increased learning and leadership experiences. (pp. 90-91)

When succession planning incorporates competency models as a way to identify the needed performances to meet present and future needs, and simultaneously to identify the necessary skills and knowledge necessary to develop leadership that aligns with the goals of the organization, succession planning becomes strategic.

Rothwell (2005), Guinn (2000), and Rothwell et al. (2005) addressed competencies as they would be considered in business and industry. While the broad competency typologies identified by Rothwell are appropriate for education (see Table 2.1), there are some differences between education and business organizations. Hallinger and Snidvongs (2008) explained, "Multiple, shifting purposes, difficulties in measuring the outcomes of the service, and uncertainties in the technologies used in schools combine to make education management a domain that requires moral and political competencies at least as much as technical ones" (p. 25). The complexity of educational leadership requires multiple types of competencies that need to be addressed by professional development programs.

*Characteristics of Effective Professional Development Programs for Principals*

Aligned with the characteristics of effective professional development for teachers, the characteristics of effective principal professional development have been described as job-embedded (Houle, 2006), on-going (Houle, 2006; Normore, 2007), evolving in a climate of trust (Houle, 2006, Piggot-Irvine, 2004), reflective in nature (Piggot-Irvine, 2004), collaborative (Houle, 2006; Normore, 2007), and strategic (Normore, 2007).

Houle (2006) studied the Urban Principals Academy (UPA) in Connecticut to gather insight into the professional development of principals in low-performing urban schools. This qualitative investigation included extended observations of professional development sessions over the course of one year targeting those urban schools that were failing to meet the

accountability standards of state of Connecticut. Houle (2006) revealed the following finding in relation to job-embedded professional development:

> What the planning committee, particularly the university facilitators, learned is that *job-embedded professional development* is a term that can be reduced to rhetoric unless the voices of the participants are heard and validated as data used in a reflective process shaping the overall format and content as long-term professional development. (p. 157, emphasis in original)

This realization, according to Houle (2006), created a challenge for professional development presenters who were trying to get the participating principals to "think outside the box" (p. 157). Zepeda (2008) stated, "Job-embedded learning is part of the teacher's daily work, it is, by its very nature, relevant to the learner" (p. 143). To be job-embedded, professional development had to be heavily contextualized, which meant recognizing the norms of the system as well as the school as being prominent influences on the way principals went about the tasks of leading and managing their schools.

Houle (2006) also found value in the relationship between higher education institutions and local school systems established as part of the professional development initiative. As an in-service initiative, higher education personnel were able to continue to bridge the gap between theory and practice in a contextual manner. Houle also found the collaborative relationships were reciprocal in nature as they "provided the university faculty with a practitioner's voice" (p. 157).

Houle (2006) found a "climate where honesty and openness were valued and appreciated" (p. 157) was a characteristic of effective professional development initiatives. This was particularly the case with urban principals of low-performing schools in the UPA initiative. Creating an environment where principals could emote, reflect, and share openly without fear of reprisal from superiors or those facilitating their development was a critical characteristic for effective learning to occur.

Piggot-Irvine (2004) reported in a qualitative study of participants in the New Zealand Principal and Leadership Centre (NZPLC) that there were certain effective characteristics of professional development for principals who were beyond the initial experiences of school leadership. Participants in the program identified reflective practice, open and honest communication among peers, and deep rather than shallow learning that encouraged the transfer of theory into practice were all characteristics of meaningful professional development.

Normore (2007) conducted a qualitative study of a large urban school district's leadership development initiatives. An ongoing continuum that was targeted at developing leadership capacity was identified as a characteristic worth noting. The continuum targeted "audiences at various stages of development and involve a supporting infrastructure (recruitment and selection structures) that aligns with the development and implementation of the entire learning system" (pp. 34-35). The strategic alignment of leadership development with the overall system goals and human resource management practices was found to be a critical characteristic for professional development initiatives.

The leadership development continuum in Normore's (2007) study presented four sequential programs:

1. Leadership Experiences and Administrative Development – "designed to provide professional development experiences for emerging/aspiring leaders (i.e., teacher leaders) in developing competency-based instructional leadership skills, and systems management skills" (pp. 14-15). This program occurred over two years.
2. Interim Assistant Principal Program – "designed to assist newly appointed assistant principals in enhancing their administrative/ leadership competencies" (p. 15). This program occurred from one to three years.

3. Intern Principal Program – "designed as a pre-service for individuals who have a three year period of successful practice as an assistant principal and seek the opportunity to participate in a formal preparation process to become a principal" (p. 15). This program could last up to two years.
4. First Year Principal Support/Interim Principal Program – "designed to provide support and professional development to individuals in their first year as principals" (Normore, 2007, p. 15).

The continuum described by Normore (2007) reflected the strategic nature of the leadership development program in a large urban school system. While limited to the career stages associated with the transition into the principalship and not on the ongoing years of leadership that occurs several years after becoming a principal, the continuum in Normore's study did describe professional development that could have a significant affect on the succession of school principals.

## Principal Supervision and Evaluation

How does principal supervision and evaluation influence principal succession? Apart from the obvious answer that principal supervision and evaluation either sustains leadership by accepting the work of the principal or disrupts leadership by firing the principal, there is a question of how principal evaluation may be used to improve the quality of principal succession. Performance assessment is a critical component of effective talent management, including the identification and development of personnel (Lawler, 2008; Rothwell, 2005; Rothwell et al., 2005). Talent management, in turn, is affected by succession events; therefore, attention should be given to evaluation and performance assessment of principals and those that aspire to be principals.

Succession involves the assessment of potential candidates for leadership positions as well as the assessment of the abilities of leaders to determine development needs; however, the attention paid to principal evaluation as a critical component to the succession, sustaining, and development of leadership has been limited (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2007; Portin, Feldman, & Knapp, 2006). Goldring et al. (2007) offered, "The identification and development of effective school leaders, both individuals and teams, however, has been significantly hampered by the paucity of technically sound tools for assessing and monitoring leadership performance" (Goldring et al., 2007, p. 1). The following review of the research on principal supervision and evaluation will concentrate on the types, purposes, and measurements of principal evaluation.

*Types of Principal Evaluation*

A study of administrator evaluation systems in selected states revealed that different types of principal evaluation existed across the United States (Davis, 2005a, 2005b). Davis selected the states for the study based on their showing "successful accountability systems in use" (Davis, 2005a, p. 7). An assumption declared by Davis was if states were successful in establishing an accountability system, then "standards-based administrators' evaluation should also be in use" (p. 7). Davis (2005a, 2005b) identified the following evaluation types:

- Checklist and ratings scale evaluation;
- Written statement evaluation;
- A combination of the two above;
- Management by objectives evaluation; and,
- Performance-based evaluations.

The checklist and ratings scale evaluation existed in 81% of the cases. Davis (2005a, 2005b) cited the ease of administering and reviewing this type of evaluation instrument as the reason for its popularity.

School administrators found the written statement evaluation to be more time consuming and required more participation from both the supervisor and the individual being evaluated. A combination of the written statement evaluation and the checklist and ratings scale evaluation was found more often than the use of written statement systems alone.

Management by objectives evaluation emphasized, "results achieved and expected growth" (Davis, 2005a, p. 7). Evaluators used specific questions to obtain data in management by objectives evaluation instruments, such as:

- "*What* are you going to do?
- *How* are you going to do it?
- *When* are you going to implement it?
- *How* are you going to measure it?" (Davis, 2005a, p. 8, emphasis in the original).

Davis identified management by objectives as becoming more popular in a standards-based environment, particularly with the increased level of accountability for student achievement placed on school leaders.

Performance-based evaluations facilitated the focus on the principal's job performance through a clear description of expectations and the collection and explanation of related artifacts or portfolio development. Davis (2005b) stipulated that for this approach to be meaningful, a clear connection to the system goals and mission is necessary. While the performance-based evaluation approach was a credible option, it was more time consuming and required more effort on the part of both evaluator and subject.

*Purposes of Principal Evaluation*

Evaluation devices for administrators have been relatively simple, relying mainly on leadership traits (inputs), instead of results (outcomes) (Portin et al., 2006). The purpose of principal assessment can be multi-faceted, and often fall into three main categories:

- Assessment for human resource management,
- Assessment to support and facilitate professional learning, and,
- Assessment to assist in the improvement of the organization (Portin et al., 2006).

While there is justification for all three of the categories of purposes for evaluation outlined by Portin et al. (2006), not all categories were found in the evaluation practices in the systems studied.

Human resource management is the most common purpose for personnel assessment practices. Goldring et al. (2007) suggested, "In many districts, the primary purpose of leadership assessment is to meet contractual obligations as part of an initial appointment review or documentation for tenure or contract renewals" (p. 1). When assessment is used for the purpose of personnel management, it is summative in nature. Summative assessments are most often used for making decisions regarding the promoting, retaining, reprimanding, or firing of personnel. The summative nature that is inherent in this purpose augments the accountability for what is measured. Summative evaluation approaches are particularly the case when the achievement of goals is a criteria for measurement (Portin et al., 2006).

Evaluation for supporting professional development is viewed as formative. When there is an emphasis placed on identifying deficiencies, presenting meaningful feedback, and offering solutions through professional learning experiences, evaluation supports continued development.

Additionally, meaningful feedback from the evaluation process can help facilitate the completion of a learning loop that promotes reflection and growth (Portin et al., 2006; Schön, 1991).

Assessment can serve a strategic purpose for organizations (Lawler, 2008; Portin et al., 2006; Rothwell, 2005). When evaluations measure leadership in relation to organizational vision, mission, and goals, evaluation not only serves the purpose of providing feedback on the performance of the individual leader but also provides feedback on the overall performance of the organization.

Portin et al. (2006) suggested, "Aligning purposes, practices, and uses with each other, and with the ultimate goal of improvement in leadership, classroom teaching, and student learning, creates a potentially powerful role that assessment can play in the development of effective schooling" (Portin et al., 2006, p. 11). Leadership assessment becomes strategic when integrated with the planning and evaluation of school improvement initiatives (Normore, 2005).

*Measurements of Principal Evaluations*

How to determine what to measure when evaluating principal performance has been a challenge (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Ginsberg & Thompson, 1992; Normore, 2003; Stufflebeam & Nevo, 1993). This challenge is rooted in the growing complexity of the job, resulting in role confusion and conflict (Ginsburg & Thompson, 1992; Normore, 2003). In addition to the confusion over role identification, there has been a difference in views about the use of standards in principal evaluation.

After reviewing numerous studies on principal evaluation, Ginsburg and Thompson (1992) cautioned against using standards in principal evaluation because of the highly contextualized nature of the job. Addressing the uses of standardized measurements, Ginsburg and Thompson argued:

> Preset [performance] standards ignore the situational nature and myriad of expectations of the job. And such [evaluation] systems probably utilize low inference criteria that are most amenable to observational rating scales. Thus, with an oversimplification of complex tasks, the actual nature of principal work may not be captured by such approaches. (Ginsburg & Thompson, 1992, p. 68)

Ginsburg and Thompson found that the criteria used in all evaluation systems focused on processes or behaviors, personal traits, or outcomes or products. Usually, most evaluation instruments measured combinations of these criteria.

In a mixed-methods study using the content analysis of 100 principal evaluation instruments used throughout the state of Virginia, Catano and Stronge (2006) found that "school districts expected principals to oversee the instructional programs in their schools, to address organizational management issues, to develop strong community relationships, and to facilitate a vision for their schools" (p. 229). The expectations of the evaluation instruments studied in Virginia reflected the standards presented by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISSLC).

In addition to the correlation to the ISSLC standards, Catano and Stronge (2006) found a strong correlation to the Standard of Accreditation (SOA) that represented the state's set of performance standards. In particular, the standards that emphasized instructional quality, staff and parent communication, and management in the areas of budget, student population, and data analysis were dominant in the instruments used to evaluate principals in the state of Virginia.

In a review of the empirical literature on leadership assessment, Portin et al. (2006) found eight categories assessed in principal evaluation instruments. The identified categories were:

- Individual characteristics;
- Behaviors;
- Competencies;

- Goals and skills;
- Relations with others;
- Functions;
- Organizational impacts; and,
- Other.

Portin et al. (2006) reported:

> In general terms, a large number of leadership assessment tools and systems attend to individual characteristics of the leader, sometimes social, sometimes matters of disposition, personality, or style. Alternatively, assessments concentrate on behaviors, actions, or interactions – in other words, observable aspects of the leaders' daily work that are assumed to correlate with desired outcomes. (p. 23)

Portin et al. concluded that measurement in principal evaluations was largely retrospective with a heavy reliance on inputs (leader behavior, traits, and characteristics) and little to no reliance on outcomes (meaningful measurements of the results of leaders' work).

Goldring et al. (2007) analyzed 66 evaluation instruments and reported, "we conclude that there is little consensus in the field around what should be assessed . . . the content of leadership assessment is 'a mile wide and an inch deep'" (p. 17). Goldring et al. promoted the use of standards to construct a framework for leader assessment, but found in their study that even with over half of the assessment instruments reviewed reported relying on the ISSLC standards, there was still a wide variance in what was assessed.

Principal evaluation is important to the succession of principals from a developmental and formative perspective (Hart, 1993). When evaluations are formative and contextual during the induction years, principals feel greater support in their socialization into a new position. In addition, when there is clarity in the criteria for evaluation and an alignment with the recruitment

and selection criteria (job descriptions), then evaluation plays a more significant role in the strategic plans to meet the goals of the organization (Lawler, 2008; Rothewll 2005).

## Principal Succession

Most of the literature on leadership succession comes from the private sector in the area of business and industry, focusing on organizational research. In an early review of research on succession of leaders in organizations, Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) found, "A thread that runs through the history of the research is that administrative succession leads to instability, which in turn influences organizational processes and performance" (Miskel & Congrove, 1985, p. 88). Earlier, Grusky (1960) observed, "Succession is important for two basic reasons: (1) *administrative succession always leads to organization instability*, and (2) *it is a phenomenon that all organizations must cope with*" (p. 105, emphasis in the original). To date, there has been a paucity of literature on leadership succession in education.

The limited research on the affects of succession on schools and school systems parallels the findings in the literature on succession in the private sector (Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hart, 1993). The following sections present a review of the literature addressing types of succession events, succession planning, and barriers to achieving effective principal succession.

### *Types of Principal Succession*

A qualitative study of four school principal succession events in Canada found two dimensions that existed related to the types of succession (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). The first dimension identified succession as being planned or unplanned. In some succession events, anticipated succession is planned for by the organization. In Hargreaves and Fink's study, there was evidence that there was a degree of planning in the succession events of two of the four

schools, while the other two schools experienced principal succession driven by unforeseen events rather than by a preconceived plan.

The second dimension represented the degree of change that occurred because of the succession event. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) identified the degree of change occurring along a continuum between continuity and discontinuity. Continuity represented little change in the direction of the school, while discontinuity resulted in a considerable change in the direction of the school.

Together, the two dimensions presented four possible types of succession events:

- Planned continuity;
- Planned discontinuity;
- Unplanned continuity; or,
- Unplanned discontinuity (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Planned continuity resulted most often when there was a planned preparation of internal personnel to move into the principalship with the desire to continue the school in the direction that it was presently going. Planned discontinuity resulted in purposeful change in the direction of the school. Often, these events led to innovation that was necessary for a significant transformation of the school, and used by either internal or external personnel to achieve the change goal.

Unplanned continuity and unplanned discontinuity most often happened by chance and were the prevalent types of succession events. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) offered:

> In reality, most cases of succession in our research ended up being a paradoxical mix of *unplanned continuity and discontinuity*: discontinuity with the achievements of a leader's immediate predecessor and continuity with (or regression to) the more mediocre state of affairs preceding that predecessor. (pp. 69-70, emphasis in the original)

Unplanned succession represented the system settling for the luck of the draw. This type of haphazard approach of unplanned succession drives the uncertainty expressed by the stakeholders in the school organization when a change in leadership occurs. In successful schools, parents, teachers, students, community members, and central office leaders wonder if the school will continue to experience success. In a struggling school, these same stakeholders wonder if the school can improve.

Fink and Brayman (2004, 2006), using the same data from the Hargreaves and Fink (2006) study, found four different types of career trajectories as defined by Wenger (1998) to be significant in determining the outcomes of a succession event (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2

*Career Trajectories Influencing Succession*

| Trajectory | Description |
|---|---|
| Inbound | Displayed by those individuals who transition into a leadership position with the "prospect of becoming full participants" (Wenger, 1998, p. 154) in the principalship. |
| Peripheral | Displayed by those individuals who never participate fully in the community of practice, but remain on the periphery. |
| Insider | Displayed by those individuals who grow and develop over time in becoming a member of the community of practice. |
| Outbound | Displayed by those whom plan or expect to move out of the community of practice at some point. |

(Fink & Brayman, 2004, 2006)

Fink and Brayman (2004, 2006) identified the outbound and peripheral trajectories as being less conducive to successful succession events than were the inbound and insider trajectories. Findings indicated that educational organizations might benefit from creating environments that support specific trajectories and discourage others.

*Succession Planning*

The research in succession planning in education is limited. While there have been studies done on the effects of leadership succession (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Fink & Brayman, 2004, 2006; Hart, 1993), there has not been research conducted on how school systems go about planning for the succession of school principals. Lack of evidence has left doubt about the existence of succession planning in school systems. Fink and Brayman (2006) explained, "In general, the non-education literatures emphasize the need to connect goal setting, recruitment, development, accountability practices, and leadership succession. . . . Yet in the public sector and particularly in education, leadership succession appears to be more serendipitous" (pp. 67-68).

All organizations have a system for dealing with the succession of leaders (Friedman, 1986). Succession systems can range from a simple replacement system involving recruiting and hiring processes to replace leaders to a complex plan that develops a leadership pipeline addressing the strategic identification of leadership competencies needed in the present and future and the development of people to master those competencies (Rothwell, 2005).

Based on their study of principal succession in four Canadian schools, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) offered the following six characteristics of "good" succession planning:

> Good succession plans
> - Are prepared long before the leader's anticipated departure or even from the onset of their appointment
> - Give other people proper time to prepare
> - Are incorporated in all school improvement plans

- Are the responsibility of many rather than the prerogative of lone leaders who tend to want to clone themselves
- Are based on a clear diagnosis of the school's existing stage of development and future needs for improvement
- Are transparently linked to clearly defined leadership standards and competencies that are needed for the next phase of improvement (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, pp. 71-72)

The few studies on principal succession have consistently called for the development of succession plans by school systems (Fink & Brayman, 2004, 2006; Hargreaves et al., 2003; Hart, 1993).

*Barriers to Succession Planning*

Although succession planning should be part of the strategic plan of the organization (Bersin, 2007; Rothwell, 2005), often there is little connection between the two (Hall, 1986). Typically, there is a heavy reliance on identifying generic qualities (e.g., communication skills, people skills, work ethic) when looking for candidates; however, these generic qualities are not necessarily focused on the specific skills and competencies that will be needed in the future to achieve the organization's goals. Often, lack of focus on specific competencies is the result of an organization not being certain of the skills that will be required in the future (Hall, 1986). As a result, the link between the work environment and the organizational strategy may be strong, but the link between organizational strategies and succession strategies is weak (Hall, 1995; Karaeveli & Hall, 2003; Ready & Conger, 2007). In a study of 235 firms, Friedman (1987b) found that development was not considered essential in succession practices. Friedman (1986) suggested, "For the next generation of leaders to be well prepared for their roles, their education must not be given short shrift" (p. 211).

Grusky (1961) shared, "Bureaucratization should serve to nullify, or at least cushion, the otherwise disruptive consequences of succession" (p. 266). Grusky found that the size of the

organization played a significant role in determining the influence succession would have. He found that the larger the organization, the less noticeable the effects of succession. The larger the organization, the less chance effective strategic succession would be realized. Bureaucracies tend to isolate job functions into departments (e.g., human resources, finance, planning, and operations) and each often have their own set of operating procedures. The loose coupling of large organizations presents challenges for collaborative problem solving and planning in bureaucratic organizations (Meyer & Rowan, 1983; Weick, 1983). The lack of a common understanding of the strategic plan presents an obstacle to the implementation of a strategic professional development plan. This is particularly noticeable when different departmental policies disassociate.

In an analysis of 700 global organizations, Bersin (2007) reported, "While more that 40 percent of organizations felt they had a well-developed workforce plan, our research found that most of these plans are little more than summaries of headcount requirements by job" (p.15). In organizations where the human resource professionals are not part of the strategic planning process, there tends to be little to no connection between planning for succession and the strategic emphasis of the organization (Pynes, 2004). For professional development to be effective and meaningful to the learner and to the succession process there must be a clear connection of the content of professional development and experiences of the learner to the strategic positioning of the organization.

Public sector organizations are likely to think in terms of the present without giving too much thought either to the past or to the future (Schall, 1997). The red tape of public organization bureaucracy can be a barrier to succession planning and particularly to professional development efforts that attempt to nurture the growth of leaders. Rainey and Bozeman (2000)

explained, “public organizations differ sharply from private organizations on formalization and red tape in processes subject to jurisdictional rules and the authority of oversight agencies that come with governmental ownership, such as personnel. . . .” (Rainey & Bozeman, 2000, p. 458). Public sector organizations tend to adhere to personnel policies to be in compliance. By doing so, there is often no further work done in developing or increasing the knowledge of employees except that, which is dictated by policy. Settling for minimally meeting the policy requirements limits the organization from pursuing meaningful development of their workforce to meet their strategic goals.

In public education, the influence of bureaucratic mandates can be seen in the centralized state government rules and regulations related to the credentialing and certifying of public educators substantiated by university principal preparation programs. When school system leaders believe that if a candidate has the credential, they must be qualified and ready for the job and there is a lack of value placed on the continued professional development of principals. The tendency to place confidence in the licensing process for most school system leaders is influenced by the mandates of policy that must be followed. Bureaucratic policies generally diminish the autonomy of systems and schools (Bidwell, 1965). Implementation through minimum compliance without further development of thought pertaining to the topic of the policy is often perceived as being easier.

A study of licensure content for principals in all 50 states and the District of Columbia revealed the following:

> No state has crafted licensing policies that reflect a coherent learning-focused school leadership agenda. On the contrary, licenses run between two extremes: a reliance on individual characteristics, such as background checks or academic degrees, that signal nothing about the purposes or practice of the principalship, and lists of knowledge and skill requirements whose scope and depth don’t clearly sum to a meaningful definition of the job. (Adams & Copland, 2005, p. 1)

The findings of the Adams and Copland (2005) study were similar to the findings in a study by Hess and Kelly (2007) where school leaders identified a lack of preparation in graduate programs tied to licensing requirements. The non-recognition of the deficits in licensing policies, and the formal educational programs associated with licensing act as barriers to effective strategic succession planning, and to some extent, reduces the ability to identify professional development needs for school leaders.

Related to the danger in relying solely on certifications obtained from formal programs, the use of job titles to determine competencies is a misconception according to Guinn (2000) who offered, "When most organizations do succession planning, they tend to focus on the job titles in their organizational charts. This [relying on job titles] results in a backwards-focused succession plan that is historically driven and not future oriented or strategically driven" (p. 390). The reliance on job titles and certifications as a sole means to define potential leaders does not adequately support organizations in effective succession planning (Hall, 1986).

An additional barrier to achieving effective strategic succession planning is the failure to connect performance reviews (or evaluations) with professional development initiatives. Organizations tend to be successful in conducting adequate reviews of personnel performance; however, the follow-up to those reviews with developmental plans and learning opportunities supporting the strengthening of skills and competencies are often lacking. Succession should be seen more than a simple replacement activity, but more as an opportunity for personnel to continue to learn and grow professionally while they are in the position (Friedman, 1986).

If candidates are not involved with the process of talent identification and performance review feedback, it is likely that there will often be disconnects between the organization's desires and the individual's desires. According to Hall (1986), "The problem with low candidate

involvement is that the organization has little information about the person's willingness to assume the position or to engage in the developmental actions which are being planned for him or her" (Hall, 1986, p. 243). The lack of candidate involvement in performance assessments and competency development is a perfect set-up for failure in getting individuals engaged in the learning process by not allowing them to have the information needed to recognize the opportunity for learning (Moore, Cervero, & Fox, 2007). The professional developer is faced with potentially having clients who do not recognize where they are in relation to the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that are addressed through the learning activities or learners who are not interested in what is being presented.

Organizational politics can serve as a barrier to orderly aspects of strategic planning (Mintzberg, 1994). The understanding of one's position within the political environment of an organization can be a detriment to the developmental aspects of succession planning (Hall, 1986; Thompson, Kirkham, & Dixon, 1985). It is not uncommon to hear about someone being on the fast-track or being highly-promotable (Ferris, Buckley, & Allen, 1992; Gandz & Murray, 1980). This can be influenced by political factors as people are "tapped" for promotion based on personal relationships as opposed to real, perceived, or potential abilities (Ferris et al., 1992; Rothwell, 2005). Rothwell (2005) offered:

> A second problem with succession planning is that it can be affected by corporate politics. Instead of promoting employees with the most potential or the best track record, top managers – or, indeed, any level of management employee – may use the corporate ladder to promote friends and allies, while punishing enemies, regardless of talent or qualifications. (p. 69)

Politics are present wherever there is the control and allocation of resources within an organization (Cuban, 1988). One resource that is controlled by school boards, superintendents,

and other central office personnel is human resource, and often the succession of personnel is influenced by the decisions and desires of those who are in the upper levels of leadership.

The literature on the succession of leaders presents research that underlines the types of succession, the importance of succession planning, and the barriers to effective succession. While a vast majority of the succession literature comes from the private business and industry organizations and non-educational public sector organization, there is a growing awareness for the need for more literature to be presented on the succession of educational leaders (Fink & Brayman, 2004, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hargreaves et al., 2003).

## Chapter Summary

With the exception of leadership succession, the literature on school leadership continues to be robust as more attention has been placed on the role of the principal and as schools are increasingly challenged by accountability mandates. With increased accountability, there has been an increase in responsibilities for principals (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Whitaker, 2003). In addition, with research increasingly indicating that leadership is a key factor in the achievement of students and the success of the school (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson et al., 2008), there has been more attention given to the quality of leadership (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003). Research in leader preparation, socialization, leader development, and leader evaluation has continued as the academic world and the world of practice attempt to gain a better understanding of school leadership; however, research on the process of principal succession has been severely lacking to date. How principals experience succession and how central office leaders experience the management of the succession process in the era of accountability has not been a focus for educational leadership research agendas.

Studies on the principal workforce reveal a growing concern with the availability of quality school leaders in the future (Farkas et al., 2003; Roza, 2003; Winter et al., 2002). It is inevitable that school systems are going to have to replace principals or to hire new principals to accommodate growth. Coupled with high-stakes accountability mandates, the succession of principals becomes critical as school systems strive to meet the rising demands of the standards of student achievement. System leaders are becoming more aware that how the succession of principals occurs can no longer be left to chance, and must be viewed much more comprehensively to include not only recruitment and replacement strategies, but also involve pre-service and in-service strategies (Bush, 2008).

Related to the growing concern about the availability of qualified leaders is the emerging understanding that leadership does influence student achievement (Robinson et al., 2008). As leadership behaviors that are based on specific knowledge, skills, and behaviors are identified as having an impact on student achievement and school performance, there is a growing understanding of the types of principals needed to lead schools to success. As principals are seen as being more critical to the performance of the school as measured by the academic achievement of students, the shortage of qualified principals is magnified as a crisis that must be confronted.

The succession literature from non-educational sectors indicated that organizations confront the issue of leader succession by planning (Bolton & Roy, 2004; Garman & Glawe, 2004; Pynes, 2004). Succession planning included leader development, supervision and performance assessment, recruitment and selection processes, and socialization strategies (Rothwell, 2005). The literature from educational research generally indicated the types of

succession and the effects that succession had on school performance, but did not address how school systems confronted the issue of changing leadership at the school level.

The purpose of this study was to examine how one school system experienced the succession of principals. The goals of the study were to identify the nature, characteristics, and practices of the succession of principals in one select Georgia school system through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants. Through understanding the experiences of those that actually succeeded into the principalship and those that managed the succession process, the way the system studied confronted the issues of succession will become evident. Hence, this study is important in contributing to the literature on the processes and experiences of principal succession.

# CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The literature reviewed on leadership succession revealed a deficit of empirically-based studies and their findings in relation to the succession of school leaders as experienced by school systems. While there has been considerable attention given to succession in the private sectors, there has been little provided in the public sector. This dearth of attention to succession in the public sector has been most notable in the area of educational leadership (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Schechter & Tischler, 2007). The purpose of this study was to examine how one school system experienced the succession of principals. This study presented an investigation of principal succession in one school system, examining professional development, socialization, supervision and evaluation, and recruitment and selection practices in relation to the succession of principals.

## Research Questions

Six educational leaders from one school district participated in the study. There were 4 different protocols used with each participant for a total of 24 interviews. Prior to beginning the first interview session, a familiarity with the background of each participant was established. The first protocol topic was socialization. The second protocol focused on the professional development either provided to or experienced by the participants. Supervision and evaluation of principals was the emphasis of the third protocol. Finally, the fourth protocol dealt with the succession of principals including recruitment, selection, and hiring processes. The four

interview protocols were designed to investigate the components of school leadership that influenced the succession of principals.

The overarching research questions that guided this study included:

1. How do school systems control the socialization and development of their school leaders?
2. How do school systems plan for the succession of school leaders?
3. Which practices related to succession are experienced in successful school systems?

## Theoretical Framework

The interpreted experiences of those who have moved into the principalship as well as those who managed that succession were the targeted foci of the study. Since this study dealt with the experiences of people (school leaders) in a social setting (schools and schools systems), the nature of the knowledge sought was based in a constructionism epistemology. The answers to the research questions were established through constructing an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of succession through an interpretive approach. The design of the study was a phenomenological approach that used the case study method as a strategy for the investigation and reporting of findings (see Figure 3.1).

### *Epistemology – Constructionism*

This study was framed in the epistemology of constructionism with the design suited to construct knowledge about the processes of succession in select Georgia school systems. The goal of the study was to achieve a "certain way of understanding *what is* (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding *what it means to know* (epistemology)" (Crotty, 2003, p. 10, italics in the original). The inductive approach of this study was rooted in a constructionist epistemology defined by Crotty (2003) as "the view that *all knowledge, and therefore all*

*meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context"* (p. 42, italics in the original).

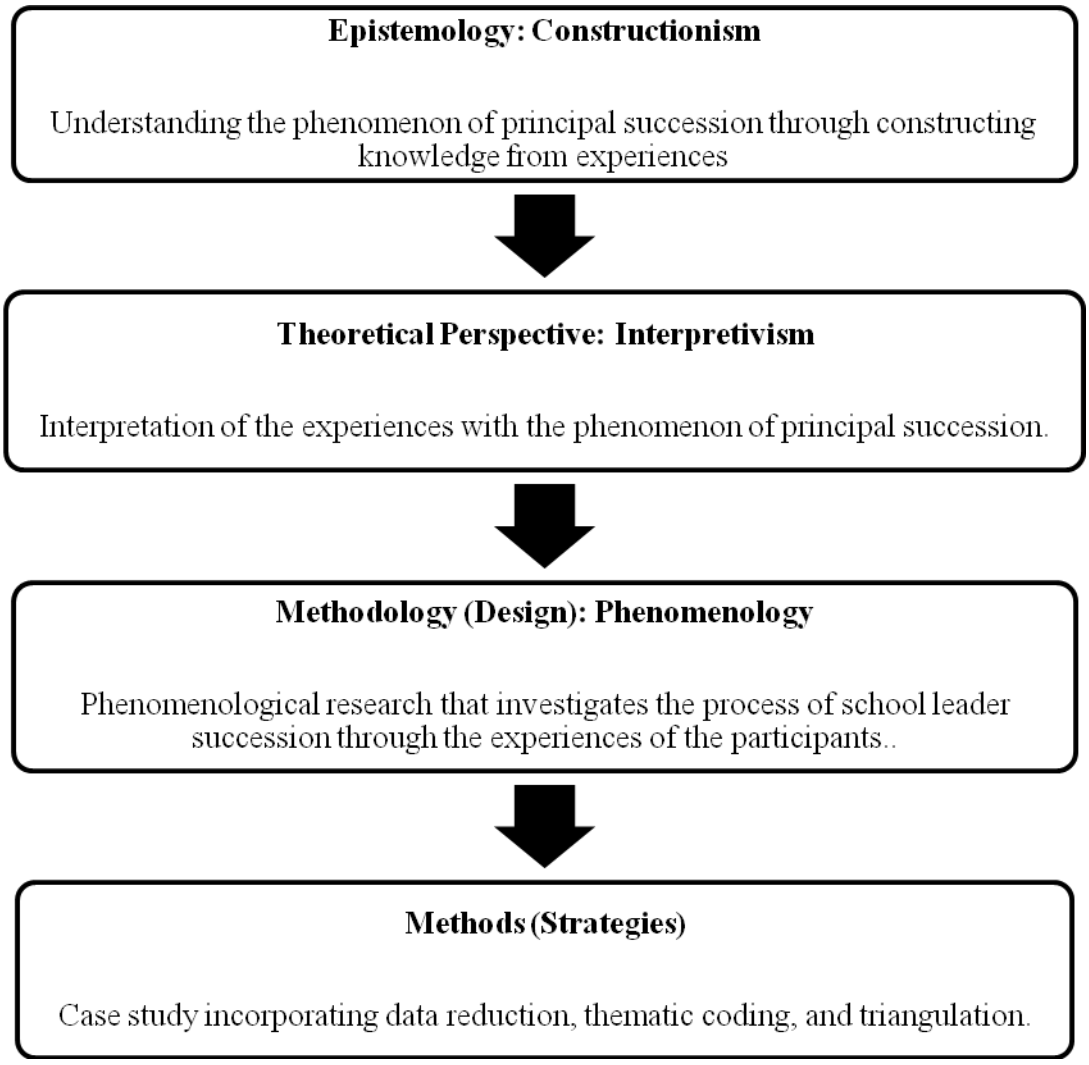


*Figure 3.1.* The sequential presentation of the four elements of the study design.

Crotty (2003) made a distinction between constructionism and constructivism. Constructivism focuses on the making of meaning through the individual mind and experiences,

while constructionism is the collective making of meaning by a group of individuals dictated by cultural and social surroundings. Others often used only the term constructivism as an epistemological paradigm that does not draw distinctions between the individual and collective generation of meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study used constructionism, aligned with the thinking of Crotty (2003), that the knowledge from the study was generated from the collective experiences of the participants.

For the participants—principals and central office administrators in this study—the process of succession resulted in experiences that shaped the meanings they held about succession. The nature of succession and the practices of planning for succession were constructed through the analysis of the experiences of multiple school system leaders and principals from one large and urban school system. Both the experiences of those who succeeded into the principalship and those who planned and monitored the succession of principals were examined. These experiences helped the researcher construct the nature and process of principal succession and helped to build an understanding of how succession was managed.

*Theoretical Perspective – Interpretivism*

Like all qualitative research, this study was "fundamentally interpretative" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 3). Having a foundation in hermeneutics, interpretivism is concerned with making meaning out of language. As Crotty (2003) explained, "It is now language, the way we speak, that is considered to shape what things we see and how we see them, and it is these things shaped for us by language that constitute reality for us" (p. 88). Maxwell (2005) argued, "the strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and having its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (p. 22). The purpose of this study was to examine how one school system experienced the succession of

principals. The goals of the study were to identify the nature, characteristics, and practices of the succession of principals in select Georgia school systems through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants.

*Methodology – Phenomenology*

The theoretical perspectives and goals of the study were pursued through an empirical phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology attempts to address the way in which the individual experiences the phenomenon in a manner that modern science is believed to be incapable of doing (Srubar, 1998). Examining the experiences of principals related to succession and the support given to them by other school leaders as they entered the principalship, required attention to the actual experience of the phenomenon. Such an examination does not call for a construction of theory or a scientific description of the experience. Moustakas (1994) suggested:

> The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience. . . . The human scientist determines the underlying structures of an experience by interpreting the originally given descriptions of the situation and interpretation of the research participant's account or story. (p. 13)

According to Merriam (2002), "The defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on describing the 'essence' of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it" (p. 93). Examination of succession as experienced by principals and by those who managed succession provided the essence of the phenomenon.

This study addressed the intentionality of the objective phenomenon of succession. The question was not if succession occurs, but instead, what was the orientation in the minds of the participants about the phenomenon of succession and how did the experiences of succession reflect the strategic use of planning by the school system. The accounts given by the participants in this study gave the researcher appropriate textual data to identify and to interpret what school

leaders experienced through the succession process from both the frame of reference of the principal who succeeded and those in the central office who managed that succession.

*Methods – Case Study*

Case study was the selected method for this study. The case study method was used to gain an understanding of a phenomenon in its real-life context (Huberman & Middlebrooks, 2000; Yin, 1997, 2009). Learning about succession required what Flyvberg (2006) identified as "context-dependent knowledge" (p. 221). The succession of principals happened within the context of individual school systems and the administrative practices and procedures within these systems.

There were "etic" issues (Stake, 2006) that existed outside of the individual case, but that pertain to the case, such as the perceived principal shortage and the state requirements for licensure. These issues were examined as part of the study to assist framing and then organizing the study. There were also "emic" issues (Stake, 2006) that were contextualized to the individual case, such as size, culture, and styles of management and leadership at the system level. These issues were what helped the researcher understand the phenomenon of succession in the context of the system studied.

## Rationale and Research Design

There have been studies on the types and effects of leader succession in schools (Fink & Brayman, 2004; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Hargreaves, Moore, Fink, Brayman, & White, 2003); however, to date, there has not been a study that helps increase the understanding of the practices that support effective planning for leadership succession in schools. To understand how school systems support succession, it was appropriate to examine the activities and behaviors of the people involved with the practices that influence the promotion and placement of school

leaders while simultaneously studying succession from those who have been promoted; hence, those who have also succeeded into a position within the system. One method of inquiry to accomplish this understanding is case study. Stake (2005) stated, "Case study facilitates the conveying of experience of actors and stakeholders as well as the experience of studying the case" (p. 454).

This study represented an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). As an instrumental case study, the researcher was interested in the succession of school leaders. The emphasis was not placed on the selected system as the subject of the study; rather, the phenomenon of principal succession acted as the subject of the study. It was determined that succession for school leaders would be studied in the context of one chosen system, but the desired goals of the study were focused on the succession of school leaders. For this reason, protocols were based in the phenomenon of succession, not the school system itself, further allowing the replication of this study in other schools systems if so desired.

Initial interview protocols were created for each of these four components based in an extensive review of the literature conducted over a one year period (Zepeda, Bengtson, Parylo, Teitelbaum, & Shorner-Johnson, 2008). According to Borman, Clarke, Cotner, and Lee (2006), "As is customary in most case-study research, the analysis [is] iterative…" (p. 133). The data collection and analysis was repeated from participant to participant. Using "replication logic" (Yin, 2003, p. 47), the same protocols were used for each participant with the understanding that the protocols, while largely remaining intact, could be modified as the study unfolded. In describing the analytic procedures in their study, Huberman and Middlebrooks (2000) offered, "… the data initially collected, served to reorient the next wave of data gathering and analysis" (p. 288). This does not suggest that the protocols were newly generated as the study progressed,

but that there were modifications made to the protocols to gain a better focus on the research questions.

The study eventually compared and contrasted the results of the individual participants as a replication that was guided by an interview protocol determined at the beginning of the design of the study. The replication aspects of the study were not strictly a form of replication logic as defined by Yin (2009). The replication aspects of this study reflected the "sameness" of the protocol for the most part, with slight variation as data revealed new ideas to pursue or more in-depth information that was desirable, causing a modification or addition to the protocol to replicate the interviews from one participant to another participant. For example, in the protocol about socialization, questions were expanded to assist in obtaining a deeper understanding of the participant's experience (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

*Iteration of Protocol Questions*

| Original Protocol Question | Final Protocol Questions |
|---|---|
| What do you imagine are the challenges that face principals in the Barker County School System? | What do you imagine is the most difficult part about being a new principal?<br>What is the greatest challenge in this system for the experienced principal? |
| What structures are in place to support the work of the principal? | What formal structures are in place to support the growth of building-level administrators?<br>What informal structures are in place to support the growth of building level administrators? |

The original protocol questions presented in Table 3.1 were expanded into two questions to generate more descriptive data in relation to the research questions. The researcher identified a

need to modify the original questions to extract more comprehensive data to address how school systems controlled the development of principals and what practices were in place to support the succession of principals.

## Data Sources

This study was an instrumental case study as opposed to an intrinsic case study. Instrumental case studies examine a phenomenon through one or more cases. Intrinsic case studies examine a particular case for the sake of explaining that particular situation or context. Stake (1995) argued:

> Case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. . . . In instrumental case study [as opposed to intrinsic case study], some cases would do a better job than others. . . . Given our purposes, which cases are likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, perhaps to even modifying of generalizations? (p. 4)

In this study, sampling was applied more to the actual selection of participants within the single case, not the case itself (Merriam, 1998).

The case selection for this study initially was driven by availability of cases from a larger study of four systems. The present study investigated one of the four systems of the larger study (Zepeda et al., 2009). The Barker County School System, a pseudonym assigned to the system, was studied. Criteria used in the selection of the case were trends in student achievement as measured by the current Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) from the state and the level of diversity of the student population. Encompassing 105 educational facilities and enrolling over 157,000 students, the Barker County School System was the largest school system in the state and was classified as urban (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

*Description of Selected Case*

| System Name | Student Enrollment | Geographic Status | Number of Schools | Number of Participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barker County | 158,630 | Urban | 105 | 6 |

At the time of the study, 99.1% of the Barker County School System schools had met the state of Georgia AYP standards (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3

*Annual Yearly Progress Data for Fall 2009 for the Barker County School System*

| System AYP status | Number of schools making AYP | Percentage of schools making AYP | School type not making AYP | Factors involved in deficiencies |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Did not meet | 104 out of 105 | 99.1% | 1 high schools | Graduation rate<br>Students with disabilities |

(Georgia State Department of Education, n.d.)

The Barker County School System had shown a steady increase in the percentage of schools making AYP with 89.1% making AYP in 2005, 84.2% making AYP in 2006, 91.1% making AYP in 2007, 96.2% making AYP in 2008, and 99.1% making AYP in 2009 (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4

*Trends in AYP Status of the Barker County School System*

| Year | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Percentage of schools making AYP | 89.1% | 84.2% | 91.1% | 96.2% | 99.1% |

The economic status of the student population was recognized as an important contextual factor in the selection of the case. Forty percent of the Barker County School System student enrollment qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. In addition, attention was given to the level of diversity of the student population (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5

*Racial Diversity of the Barker County School System compared to state*

| | Asian | Black | Hispanic | Native American | White | Multi-racial |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barker County | 10% | 27% | 22% | 0% | 36% | 4% |
| State | 3% | 38% | 10% | 0% | 46% | 3% |

There were six participants in the study of the Barker County School System. The participants included the superintendent, central office administrators, and principals. The Executive Director of Leadership Development provided names of principals and central office personnel that would participate in the study. Those individuals in the system who were responsible for or recipients of leadership recruitment and selection, professional development of leaders, support of leaders, and the evaluation and supervision of leaders were considered.

Sources of evidence in case study data are most often identified as observation, interviews, archival records, physical artifacts, and document analysis (Stake, 1995, 2006; Yin, 2009). The purpose of this study was to examine how one school system experienced the phenomenon of principal succession. Interviewing is the most often used method of capturing how participants experience a phenomenon (Seidman, 2006). In this study, data were collected through interviews, fieldnotes, memos, human resource records, and documents with the most substantial amount of data coming from the spoken words of the participants captured through semi-structured interviews (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6

*Sources of Data*

| Sources of Data | Description |
|---|---|
| Semi-structured interviews | Phase I: 4 protocols (6 participants)<br>• Socialization<br>• Professional development<br>• Evaluation and supervision<br>• Succession |
| Artifacts and documents | Promotion frameworks<br>Job descriptions<br>Evaluation instruments<br>Professional development plans<br>Meeting agendas<br>Human resource records<br>School board policies |
| Fieldnotes | Summary of experiences of the researcher during each day of interviews |
| Memos | Thoughts and reflections of the researcher during the analysis of data |

## Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Each of the six participants was interviewed four times using protocols that addressed socialization, professional development, evaluation and supervision, and succession. In addition to the 24 transcripts, fieldnotes from each day of interviews, memos from the initial analysis, and artifacts from the Barker County School System were collected and then analyzed.

Interviews were recorded with the Olympus 300M and Olympus 310M Digital Voice Recorders. The researcher conducted the interview and took notes, capturing salient points and notable quotes. The researcher compiled fieldnotes at the end of each day of interviewing. All audio files, individual interview notes, and fieldnotes were then uploaded to the researcher's personal computer for future analysis.

## Data Analysis

The analysis used in this research was based on the theoretical proposition that effective succession planning was strategic in nature. This theoretical proposition was a result of the review of literature on succession planning from both the private and public sectors. The research questions, interview protocols, and identification of artifacts collected were driven by this proposition. This theoretical orientation guided the analysis of data and helped to reduce the data into more focused and manageable units. Yin (2009) identified this strategy as being the most effective for most case study research. Through this analysis, the development of new understandings were developed that specifically addressed succession of school leaders in the Barker County School System (see Table 3.7).

Table 3.7

*Using Theory to Generate New Understandings*

| Generic Finding | Theory Application | New Understanding |
|---|---|---|
| There was evidence of a formal mentoring program for new principals. | Organizations can control socialization. | Mentoring was used strategically to control socialization and assist the succession of principals. |
| There was identification of specific sought after competencies. | When competency models are used and aligned with selection and recruitment, development, and evaluation processes, effective succession occurs. | Defined competencies were used strategically in the alignment of selection and recruitment, development, and evaluation of principals. |

*Single Case Analysis*

There are multiple ways to analyze data from a case-study (Yin, 2009). The analysis process was framed in a sequence (see Figure 3.2); however, the analysis was fluid. While the sequence was logical, each stage of analysis was ongoing and iterative.

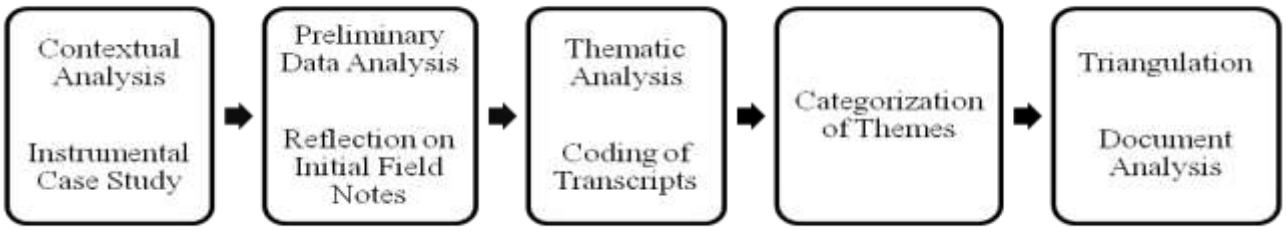


Figure 3.2. *Single Case Data Analysis Process*

To examine the phenomenon of succession within the context of the case, embedded analysis of the data was required. Embedded analysis resulted in a thick description of the case, and addressed specific aspects of the case (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009).

The case presented a unique context that was analyzed through observations, demographic studies, and work force trends as related to the phenomenon of succession. The single case study was therefore not seen as an intrinsic study requiring extensive contextually-rich description, but the single case was seen as an instrumental study that would be able to provide a contextual description relative to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995).

*Contextual Analysis*

The initial analysis procedure involved gaining familiarity with the context of the case. The contextual analysis phase required the gathering of specific data that contributed to the description of the Barker County School System (see Table 3.8). The contextual analysis assisted in establishing the boundaries of the case and providing a snapshot of the Barker County School system that assisted the researcher to ground a frame of reference for further analysis.

*Preliminary Data Analysis*

Preliminary analysis occurred as data were collected (Grbich, 2007). As interview notes and fieldnotes were written and documents retrieved, there was an initial analysis that occurred. Reflection on the interview experiences, fieldnotes, and retrieved documents assisted the researcher in being immersed further into the context of the case. Grbich (2007) explained, "A phenomenological approach would require you to get as close as possible to the essence of the experience being studied while displaying the comments of those being researched in their own voices" (p. 19).

Table 3.8

*Data Examined to Establish Context of the Case*

| Data Topic | Description | Source |
|---|---|---|
| History | Geographical information, size, growth, and background of system | Interviews<br>System web site |
| Participant biography | Years of experience, training, positions held | Interviews |
| System demographics | Diversity of system by race and special groups, enrollments | System report card |
| Work force | System hierarchy, size of principal workforce, trends in attrition of principals | Interviews<br>Artifacts |
| System performance | Student achievement as measured by state AYP | System report card |

Both the contextual analysis and the preliminary analysis supported the researcher in gaining an initial understanding of the phenomenon of principal succession in the Barker County School System. This preliminary analysis influenced the more formal analysis that followed, underscoring the iterative nature found in much of qualitative research (Grbich, 2007; Merriam, 1998).

*Thematic Analysis*

Data from interviews, interview notes, and fieldnotes were analyzed using thematic coding derived from the preliminary analysis and the research questions. The analysis, while using coding techniques typically associated with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), were driven by the research questions (Yin, 2009). The research questions reflected the theory that succession

of principals can be planned or unplanned. Succession theory suggested that when succession was strategically planned, positive organization performance could be sustained and negative organization performance could be improved (Fulmer & Conger, 2004; Rothwell, 2005). Unlike grounded theory, where codes randomly emerge from the data, the analysis in this study was anchored in succession theory.

Before any formal coding could be done, a reduction of the transcript data was necessary to provide a more manageable and relevant analysis. Using a phenomenological reduction strategy similar to one introduced by Hycner (1985), the data from the 24 transcripts were reduced to specific units of relevant meaning and themes were constructed (see Table 3.9).

Coding the data was critical in the analysis for this study. A form of open coding was used in the identification of general themes. Open coding was defined by Grbich (2007) as a process that "involves word by word, line by line analysis questioning the data in order to identify concepts and categories that can be dimensionalised (broken apart further)" (p. 74). Hycner's (1985) delineation of units of relevant meaning was used as a form of open coding, allowing the researcher to start reducing the data with a deliberate and thorough approach.

Following the establishment of units of general meaning, units of meaning relevant to the research questions were identified. The identification of units of relevant meaning greatly reduced the transcript texts to more manageable data. After reducing the data further by eliminating redundancies in the units of relevant meaning, the data set was ready for selective coding (Grbich, 2007).

Selective coding took place by creating initial codes from the research questions (Yin, 2009). Once initial codes were established, a second iteration of codes were identified to begin

Table 3.9

*Phenomenological Reduction of Data*

| Steps of Reduction Process | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. Transcribe interviews | Transcriptions were done of each interview with care taken in noting nuance and emphasis of the spoken words of the participants. |
| 2. Bracketing | The researcher, who had experience as a principal, spent time reflecting on his feelings and assumptions about succession from his own experience. This step was important to decrease the level of potential subjectivity in the analysis and assisted in the researcher trying to stay true to the data as the analysis unfolded. |
| 3. Listen to interviews and read the transcripts | Once transcriptions were completed, the researcher listened and read each transcript to get "a sense of the whole" (Hycner, 1985, p. 281). |
| 4. Delineate units of general meaning | Every word, sentence and phrase of each transcript is examined and units of general meaning are identified. |
| 5. Delineate units of relevant meaning | From the units of general meaning, units of meaning that are relevant to the research questions are identified. |
| 6. Eliminate redundancies | With 24 transcripts, redundancies in the units of relevant meaning were prevalent. When units of relevant meaning were identical, the redundancies were removed. |
| 7.Code units of relevant meaning | Initial codes related to the research questions were used to identify relevant meanings. |
| 8. Cluster units of relevant meaning | Secondary codes were used to group the unit of meanings into like clusters. |
| 9. Identify themes | Themes summarizing the clusters were identified. |

clustering the initial codes into more general descriptions. Finally, themes were then identified from the second iteration of codes (see Table 3.10).

*Categorization of Themes*

The categorization of themes was the fourth stage in the analysis process. By examining the clusters of meaning presented in the second iteration of codes, the researcher looked for emerging themes that could explain, amplify, and then allow the researcher to summarize the experiences of the participants. Hycner (1985) explained, "The researcher interrogates all the clusters of meaning to determine if there is one or more central themes which express the essence of these clusters" (p. 290).

In this case study, an example of the emergence of a theme was the second iteration codes that repeatedly were represented in the transcripts of all the participants and often throughout most, if not all, of the protocols. The experience of being mentored, the organizational culture of the system, and the involvement of the superintendent were examples of second iteration codes that led to the development of the theme of system control of organizational socialization.

*Triangulation*

While phenomenological studies rely predominantly on interview data (Koro-Ljunberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009), case study research is strengthened through the use of multiple data sources (Yin, 2009). Using multiple sources of data assisted in establishing credibility and validity of the study. One method of triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). For this study, the triangulation of data was accomplished by using additional documents from the Barker County School System. The

Table 3.10

*Code Mapping of Transcript Data (to be read from bottom up)*

| Research Questions | | |
|---|---|---|
| RQ#1: How do school systems control the socialization and development of their school leaders? | RQ#2: How do school systems plan for the succession of school leaders? | RQ#3: Which practices related to succession are experienced in successful school systems? |
| **Themes** | | |
| Challenges Associated with the Principalship<br>Succession Planning – A Sense of Urgency<br>Principal Socialization – Increasing the Control<br>Principal Evaluation – Aligning and Basing on Results<br>Professional Development – A Means of Support | | |
| **Second Iteration Codes** | | |
| 1B. Being mentored | 2B. Role management | 3B. Recruitment and selection practices |
| 1B. Establishment of cultural norms | 2B. Developing leadership capacity | 3B. Internal leadership development |
| 1B. Superintendent influence | 2B. Dealing with adult issues | 3B. System goals |
| 1B. District involvement in preparation programs | 2B. Developing and maintaining a vision | 3B. Transparency |
| 1B. Extending formal preparation programs | 2B. System expectations | 3B. Student achievement |
| 1B.Aligned professional development initiatives | 2B. Community expectations | 3B. Other evaluation criteria |
| | 2B. Attrition | 3B. Just-in-time training |
| | 2B. Applicant pool | |
| **Sample of Initial Selective Codes** | | |
| 1A. Control of professional development | 2A.Challenges in recruiting and selection | 3A. Expected leadership behaviors |
| 1A. Differentiated development | 2A. Demand for school leaders | 3A. External vs. internal hires |
| 1A. Focus of development | 2A. Goals and outcomes | 3A. Input to process |
| 1A. Perceived effect of development | 2A. Input to process | 3A. Leadership pool development |
| 1A. Positive experiences with leadership development | 2A. Responsibility for planning | 3A. Process |
| 1A. Negative experiences with leadership development | 2A. Leadership pool strength | 3A. Support |
| 1A. Curriculum of leadership development | 2A. Succession strategy | 3A. Transparent evaluation system |
| | 2A. Sought after attributes (knowledge, skills, and abilities) | 3A. Results-based evaluation |
| | | 3A. Partnership with higher education institution |
| **Units of Relevant Meaning from 24 Transcripts** | | |

identification of documents was based on the relation to the topic presented in the research questions (see Table 3.11). Having access to documents provided an opportunity to cross reference what was being said by the participants to what was being proposed through policies, meeting schedules, and public statements. The triangulation using data from the interviews and documents helped to increase the trustworthiness of the study.

Table 3.11

*List of Documents Used to Triangulate Data*

| Document Type | Description |
|---|---|
| Official policy documents | • Leadership Evaluation Procedural Record<br>• Results-Based Evaluation Instrument |
| Training materials | • Definition of Quality-Plus Leader (PowerPoint)<br>• Results-Based Evaluation System (PowerPoint)<br>• Just-In-Time Training for New Principals (schedule) |
| Web-based documents | • System vision, mission, and goals<br>• Superintendent's message on the Barker County School System vision for leadership<br>• School board's Theory of Action for Change to Improve Student Achievement<br>• Quality-Plus Leader Academy curriculum strands<br>• Barker County School System Cluster Assignments |

## Trustworthiness

Case studies are designed to investigate a phenomenon within a given context. The goal was not to determine the reality of the phenomenon outside of the case. Because of the nature of case studies, researchers often are challenged to explain the reliability, validity, and generalizability of their research findings.

*Reliability*

Reliability has roots in quantitative research and usually deals with the replication of studies to obtain the same results. In qualitative research, reliability is more evasive. Merriam (1998) explained:

> Because of what is being studied in education is assumed to be in flux, multifaceted, and highly contextual, because information gathered is a function of who gives it and how skilled the researcher is at getting it, and because the emergent design of a qualitative case study precludes a priori controls, achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible. (p. 206)

Instead of establishing reliability, the dependability of results is considered. Borman et al., (2006) suggested, ". . . rather than demanding that outsiders obtain similar results in replication of the study in question, the aim should be that outsiders concur that given the data collected, the results make sense – they are consistent and dependable" (p. 130).

Reliability in case study can be described as the level to which another investigator can replicate the study (Merriam, 1998; Meyer, 2001; Yin, 2009). This case study can be easily replicated in any school system providing there was access to the appropriate participants. Yin (2003) proposed, "The general way of approaching the reliability problem is to make as many steps as operational as possible and to conduct the research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder" (p. 38). The documentation of the process was attended to and completed from the conception of the study by the researcher, providing a opportunity for other researchers to replicate the study in any given school system or systems.

*Validity*

Validity of qualitative case study research involves the establishment of a reality through the findings (Merriam, 1998), and "relies on the competence, skills, and rigor of the researcher" (Borman et al., 2006, p. 130). This study established validity by using a number of participants

(superintendents, central office administrators, and principals) as opposed to a single participant. This study compared multiple perspectives from both within each participant and across multiple participants which led to a representation of the reality of principal succession as it existed within the Barker County School System through pattern matching, a common strategy used to strengthen the validity of a case study (Yin, 2009). In addition, the comparison of the findings to the existing research assisted in establishing the reliability and validity of the study.

The strategies of triangulation, peer examination, and multiple interview sessions enhance the validity of case study research (Borman et al., 2006; Merriam, 1998). Case study depends on the triangulation of data from sources that include "direct observations, interviews, documents, archival files, and actual artifacts" (Yin, 1997, p. 69). Interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and documents allowed for triangulation of data that supplements the individual experiences of the participants.

The use of the same interview protocols for each participant contributed to the validity through replication logic (Yin, 2009). The four interview protocols used (socialization, professional development, supervision and evaluation, and succession) allowed for the increase of validity as the participants and the researcher became more comfortable and familiar with each other as well as with the process.

*Generalizability*

Generalization in qualitative research has been widely debated by researchers (Merriam, 1998). This is particularly true in case study research, especially in single-case research projects (Merriam, 2002). Firestone (1993) identified three arguments for generalization in qualitative research (see Table 3.12). The three arguments were considered in the discussion of this study.

Table 3.12

*Three Arguments for Generalization*

| Argument | Description |
|---|---|
| Extrapolation from sample to population | This argument relies on sampling and probability theory. Samples are selected from a chosen population that is relative to the study question. The larger the sample the more acceptable the generalization. |
| Analytic generalization or extrapolation using a theory | This argument uses a theory to make predictions that are then compared to the findings of the study. If the findings agree with the theory, then generalization is seen as possible. |
| Case-to-case translation | This argument suggests that the generalization is made as findings are seen a transferable from the studied case to another case, mainly the case of the reader. |

Firestone (1993)

In qualitative case study research, extrapolation from a sample to a larger population is the most challenging of the three arguments offered by Firestone (1993). A single case study does allow for a level of generalization to occur, particularly since the selected school system represented a large urban school system similar to others in the state of Georgia and perhaps in other parts of the United States. However, the generalization argument that supports extrapolation from a single sample to the general population of Georgia or other school systems is not strong because each school system has it's own defined context. On the other hand, this level of generalization can be useful in informing policy-makers and by identifying collective practice that were related to principal succession and the practices surrounding socialization, principal supervision and evaluation, and principal development (Stake, 2006).

Extrapolation from a theory requires the establishment of predictions that the findings of the study will confirm or will disconfirm an existing theory (Firestone, 1993). The argument was

that effective succession planning, strategic in nature, was the theoretical basis of this study. The interview protocols addressed the strategic factors that have been identified in the literature on succession planning. This study did not attempt to determine the effectiveness of principal succession as much as it tried to determine the nature of planning for principal succession; therefore, generalization by predicting the findings as they were related to succession theory is not appropriate.

The third generalization argument of Firestone (1993) was applicable to this study. This argument called for the transfer of findings of the study by the reader, not the researcher (Firestone, 1993; Merriam, 2002). To be transferable, the individual case study must be rich in contextual description. Merriam (2002) explained, "In order to facilitate the reader (not the researcher) transferring findings from one study to his or her present situation, the researcher must provide enough detail of the study's context so that comparisons can be made" (p. 29). The argument for case-to-case (or case-to-reader) generalization is similar to the concept of naturalistic generalization described by Stake (1995). Acting as a communication tool, the case study provided information to others to help develop a reality. This study was designed to provide a rich description of the nature of succession planning in one selected school system. School leaders in other Georgia systems (and perhaps beyond) may find that the information communicated through this study can help them better understand the nature of succession in their systems.

## Assumptions of the Study

A major methodological assumption made in this study was that the participants provided accurate accounts of their experiences with socialization, professional development, supervision and evaluation, and succession. The selection of participants was evidence of this assumption. It

was assumed that principals, superintendents, and central office administrators have had the appropriate experiences with the various factors related to succession. The multiple interviews helped to support this assumption by providing the researcher an opportunity to revisit experiences with the participants and to check for consistency.

The methodology used in this study assumed socialization, supervision and evaluation, professional development, and succession were present in all school systems. As stated earlier, succession occurs in every organization, including school systems. Much like succession, socialization is present whenever a person enters a new professional or cultural environment. Succession and socialization can be thought of as safe assumptions as presented by organizational theorists (Morgan, 2006; Schein, 2004). Professional development for school leaders and evaluation was assumed to be present in all systems in the state. What was not assumed was the nature of these practices, which was explored in this study.

A final assumption of the study was that if school systems were finding success with student achievement as measured by AYP standards, then the leadership in those systems was seen as effective by the central office leaders in the Barker County School System. This assumption was based in the literature that suggested that leadership does have an impact on student achievement (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003; O'Donnell & White, 2005; Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003).

## Limitations of the Study

Sampling in qualitative research is a critical issue as it is always done with a purpose in mind (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study was limited in the sense that all school systems in Georgia were not accessible nor was it possible to conduct this study as designed on such a large scale. The size of sample of cases was limited to one system that represented only 0.54% of the

183 school systems in Georgia; hence, the low number of systems studied affected the ways in which the generalization of findings could be considered.

Related to the issue of sampling, the selection of participants within the case was limited to the recommendation of the superintendent or his designee. This limitation in participant sampling increased the chance of the system selecting participants who might represent the system in a positive light if the superintendent or his designee considered the study to be evaluative in nature. The limitation could have possibly stood in the way as a barrier in getting well-rounded perspectives on principal succession. While this could and should be considered a limitation of the study, since the study was not evaluative in nature, it was in the opinion of the researcher, seen as an advantage in gaining access to principals and central office personnel.

Finally, this study involved examining only one school system as opposed to a multiple case study where several school systems might be studied. In most multiple case studies, there are between 4 and 10 cases represented allowing for "enough of the interactivity between programs and their situations" (Stake, 2006, p. 22). This limitation was not identified as a weakness in this study, but instead this limitation was seen as providing the need for further research in this area. More cases could be studied using this single case study as a template for conducting further research.

# CHAPTER 4

# BARKER COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM—A CASE STUDY

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how one selected school system experienced the succession of principals. To further define the study, one large and fast-growing urban system was chosen. The researcher was interested in examining a system that had experienced success in student achievement; therefore, a critical feature was the success as measured by the number of schools meeting the state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements. The research questions guiding the study were:

7. How do school systems control the socialization and development of their school leaders?
8. How do school systems plan for the succession of school leaders?
9. Which practices related to succession are experienced in successful school systems?

The goals of the study were to identify the nature, characteristics, and practices of the succession of principals in a selected Georgia school system through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants.

The Barker County School System was selected from a larger study of four systems based on characteristics and data that provided a rich source of information related to the research questions. The names of the system and participants were changed to pseudonyms to meet the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements to protect the confidential nature of the study. The Barker County School System was a large, fully-accredited system located in the

southeastern United States serving one of the fastest growing counties in the United States with a projected county population of 789, 499 by 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

## School System Context

Barker County was the second largest of 20 counties making up an expanding metropolitan area. As the metropolis grew, Barker County was transformed from a suburban/rural community to an urban/suburban community as the convenience of access to the city and sufficient services made it an attractive place to live. Adding to the attractiveness was the Barker County School System with a positive reputation for school performance and student achievement.

At the time of this study, the Barker County School System reported a student enrollment of just over 158,630 (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). The Barker County School System supported 114 schools situated in both urban and suburban settings. Of these schools, there were 69 elementary schools (grades K-5), 20 middle schools (grades 6-8), and 16 high schools (grades 9-12). In addition, nine other schools hosted special programs, including two charter schools and several alternative programs to provide students with educational options. The schools are grouped into 17 different "clusters" with multiple elementary schools feeding into the same middle schools that, in turn, feed into a single high school. The 17 clusters are divided into 3 geographic areas to support the governance of the large number of schools. As part of a growing metropolitan area, the system had experienced an aggressive rate of growth, and was projecting a further substantial increase in enrollment in the years to come as was evidenced by the opening of 10 new schools for the school year following the year of this study.

*Staffing Profile*

Barker County School System had a hierarchical structure typical of large school systems (see Figure 4.1). With a large central office staff along with a school-based administrative staff of over 114 principals and 500 assistant principals, oversight of school operations from a system level was a critical concern of the system leaders. The increasing size of the system led to an increase in the hierarchical structure common as an organizational reaction to the contingency of size (Donaldson, 2001). To help bridge the gap between school and system leadership, the system created three area superintendent positions to work directly with principals. Each area superintendent worked with specific clusters of schools (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

*Area Superintendent Assigned Schools*

| | Area Superintendent 1 | Area Superintendent 2 | Area Superintendent 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Elementary | 25 | 23 | 25 |
| Middle | 8 | 7 | 9 |
| High | 6 | 5 | 6 |
| Total Schools | 39 | 35 | 40 |
| Total Clusters | 6 | 5 | 6 |

The area superintendents were responsible for the evaluation and supervision of principals. Their charge was to monitor the leadership of the school in the clusters that they were assigned, and they worked closely with principals in the development and delivery of school improvement plans. Area superintendents routinely met with principals in evaluation conferences, and they served as consultants, when needed, to the individual schools. The

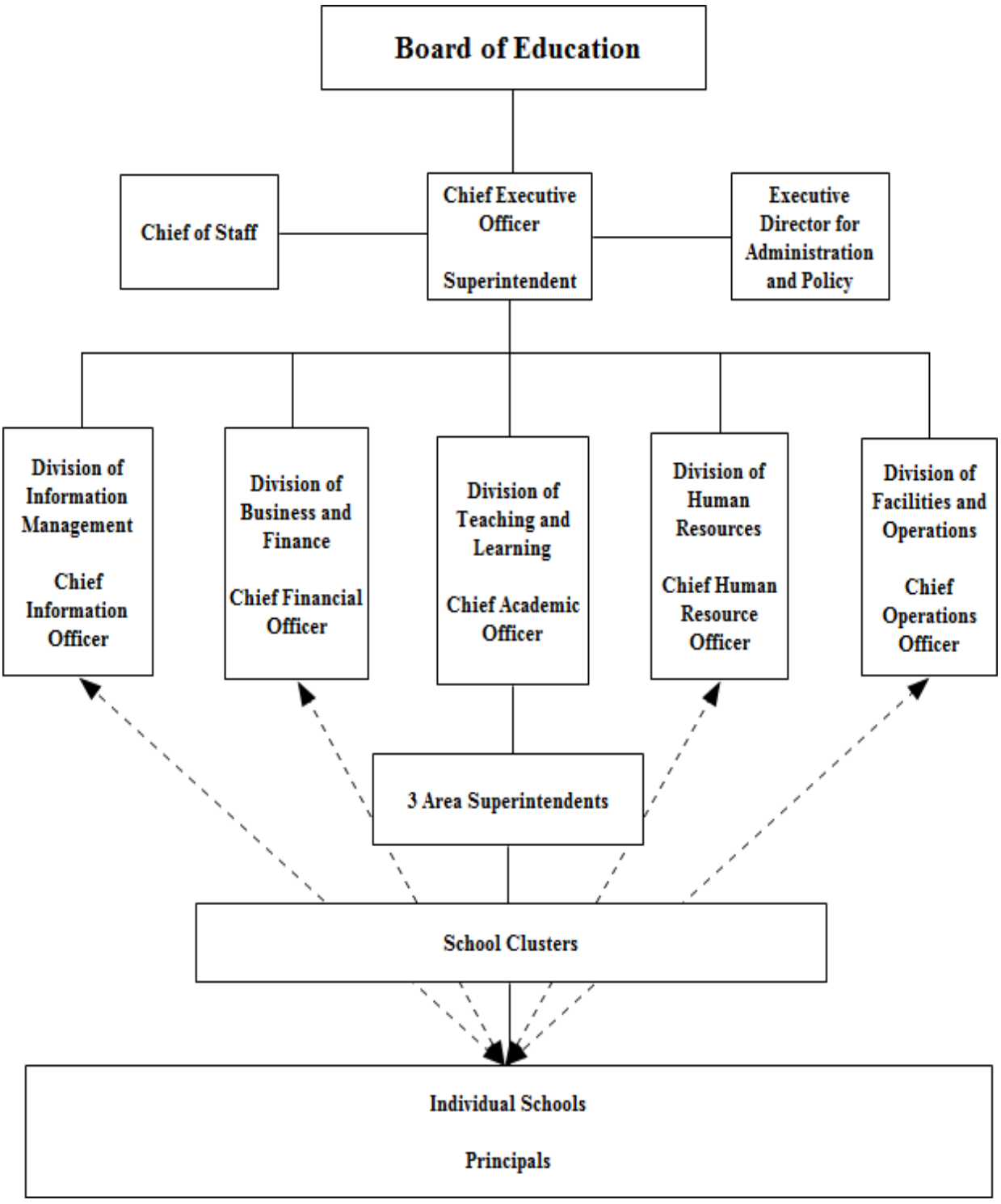


*Figure 4.1* Organizational Chart of the Barker County School System.

facilitation of the principal evaluations using the Leadership Evaluation Instrument (LEPR) and the Results-Based Evaluation System (RBES) was the responsibility of the area superintendents. They communicated directly with the Chief Academic Officer in the Division of Teaching and Learning who, in turn, communicated with the superintendent of the Barker County School System (see Figure 4.1).

Principals also had direct access to the other divisions within the Barker County School System (i.e., Division of Information Management, Division of Business and Finance, Division of Human Resources, and Division of Facilities and Operation). Area superintendents also communicated regularly with the various divisions to ensure system coherence in supporting the work of the Barker County School System principals.

At the elementary school level, a typical school enrolled anywhere between 800 and 1200 students. Enrollment at the middle school level ranged from roughly 1,000 to 2,700 students. Finally, at the high school level, student enrollments were between roughly 1,000 and 3,500 students. All schools were led by a principal and had anywhere from 1 to 12 assistant principals. In addition, there were various administrative positions at the high schools that did not carry the title of assistant principal (i.e., athletic director, community school director, and director of safety). In general, the ratios of students to teacher, teacher to administrator, teacher to support personnel, and teacher to staff were greater than the state ratios (see Table 4.2). The number of teachers per administrator was greater than the state ratio, indicating that as one of the largest systems in the state, the Barker County School System administrators were supervising more teachers with less administrative staff.

Table 4.2

*Barker County School System Certified Personnel Position Ratios (2006-2007)*

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

| | Teacher: Administrator | Teacher: Support Personnel | Teacher: Staff | Student: Teacher |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barker County School Dist. | 18 : 1 | 15 : 1 | 8 : 1 | 15 : 1 |
| State Avg. | 14 : 1 | 10 : 1 | 6 : 1 | 14 : 1 |

*Student Demographic Profile*

Demographically, the Barker County School System had a culturally and linguistically diverse population reflected by the system parent/student handbook published in five different languages including English, Bosnian/Serbian/Croation, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The student population was predominantly White (36%) with significant Black (27%) and Hispanic (22%) populations (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

*Barker County School System Racial Breakdown of Student Population*

| | Asian | Black | Hispanic | Native American | White | Multiracial |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barker County School System | 10% | 27% | 22% | 0% | 36% | 4% |
| State Avg. | 3% | 38% | 10% | 0% | 46% | 3% |

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

Data indicated that the Barker County School System had less Black and White students than the state average; however, the Hispanic student population was considerably higher than the state average. Special populations of students in Barker County School System were reported with

11% of the total student enrollment received special education services, 13% received gifted services, 36% participated in vocational labs, and 1% of all students were enrolled in alternative programs (see Table 4.4).

The percentage of students receiving special education services in the Barker County School System was roughly the same as the state average. The percentage of students receiving gifted services was slightly higher than the state average. The most noticeable difference in services through special programs was found in vocational labs in high schools with

Table 4.4

*Barker County School System Students in Special Programs (2006-2007)*

| | Special Education (K-12) | Gifted (K-12) | Vocational Labs (9-12) | Alternative Programs (K-12) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barker County School System | 11% | 13% | 36% | 1% |
| State Avg. | 12% | 9% | 52% | 2% |

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

Barker County School System serving 36% of their high school students, well below the state average of 52% of all high school students.

*Student Achievement/System Performance Profile*

The Barker County School System as a system did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2009; however, 99.1% of all Barker County schools made AYP, and the school system made progress on increasing the percentage of schools making AYP from year to year since 2004 with the exception of 2006 (see Table 4.5). The system did not meet AYP standards as a result of the combined subgroup populations from all of the schools (e.g., special education, English language learners). While the number of schools meeting the AYP standard increased as

more students in subgroups met the AYP standard, when the system total of students represented in the subgroups were measured, the system, as a whole, did not meet AYP standards. The deficiencies were in the area of student achievement measured by the Georgia High School Graduation Tests in Mathematics and Language Arts for the special education and English-language learners.

Table 4.5

*Adequate Yearly Progress Trends for Barker County School System*

| Year | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of schools reported in AYP data | 92 | 101 | 101 | 101 | 105 | 109 |
| Percentage of schools making AYP | 85.9% | 89.1% | 84.2% | 91.1% | 96.2% | 99.1% |

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

Logic would suggest that a growing school system with increasing diversity would struggle with meeting the AYP mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act; however, as one Barker County School System central office administrator explained:

> So, one of the challenges is to defy conventional wisdom which says as your student population becomes more diverse, as the number of free and reduced lunch children you have grows, and as you deal with more children from poverty. . . then all the measures of student achievement seem to go down. So, the challenge is to defy that. And we have been defying that. Rather than declining, our measures are showing improvement.

In 2009, 93.6% of Barker County School System students met or exceeded the set standard on the state's AYP standardized measurement in reading across grade one to eight. Standardized test scores in math for grades 1 through 8 revealed 87.3% of the students taking the exam met or

exceeded the standard. Eighty-eight percent of students met or exceeded target scores for the Eighth Grade Writing Assessment.

The end-of-course tests administered in Barker County School System varied across the eight subjects. Students had the lowest Pass and Pass Plus percentage in Physical Science (57%) and the highest percentage in American Literature & Composition (88%). A large proportion of eleventh grade students passed the Georgia High School Writing Test (94%). About 64% of Barker County School Systems' students who took Advanced Placement (AP) exams received scores of three or higher, qualifying them for college credit. For the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT), the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the standard for language arts was 94.9%, and 88.7% of the students met or exceeded the standard in mathematics (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). In addition, the average scores of students on standardized tests were consistently higher than state averages (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

*Student Achievement*

| | 2006-2007 | | | | | 2007-2008 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % Students Take SAT | Avg. Comp. SAT Score | % Students Take AP Exams | AP Exam Scores 3 or Higher | % HOPE Scholarship Eligibility | Grad. Rates | Dropout Rates Grades 7-12 | Dropout Rates Grades 9-12 |
| Barker | 70.3 | 1524 | 14.6 | 64.4 | 42 | 79.1 | 2.0 | 2.8 |
| State Avg. | 55.7 | 1458 | 8.6 | 52.7 | 38.1 | 75.4 | 2.6 | 3.6 |

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

The average graduation rate for the Barker County School System was 79%. The dropout rate was low for grades 7 to12 (2%) and grades 9 to 12 (3%). The average Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score for high school seniors was 1524, and 42% of the students in the system were

eligible for the Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) Scholarship (see Table 2.5). The Class of 2008 earned more than $88 million in scholarships. In addition, 89% of 2007-2008 Barker County School System graduates planned to attend colleges and other postsecondary schools. The school system offered over 3,000 advanced placement courses and graduated more than 1,600 honor students in 2007.

## Barker County School System Participant Profiles

Six educational leaders from Barker County were selected to participate in this study, three central office leaders and three school principals (see Table 4.7). The principals were selected based on their recent succession into the principalship with a concerted effort to have all three levels of schools represented (i.e., elementary, middle, and high). The central office leaders were selected because of their position in relation to the succession of principals. The Superintendent was ultimately responsible for the leadership workforce in the system; the Executive Director of Human Resources was directly responsible for the recruitment and selection of personnel; and the Executive Director of Leadership Development had the responsibility for developing the leadership capacity of the school system.

Table 4.7

*Participant Data*

| Name | Title | | Years in Education | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Position | Admin. | Total |
| William Atkins | Superintendent | M.S. | 13 | 41 | 44 |
| Paul Garmin | Exec. Dir. for Leadership Development | Ed.D. | 4 | 32 | 34 |
| Denise Franklin | Chief Human Resources Officer | Ph.D. | 8 | 20 | 26 |
| Randi Martin | Elementary Principal | Ed.S. | <1 | 6 | 13 |
| Bruce Villa | Middle School Principal | Ph.D. | <1 | 4 | 21 |
| Diane Davidson | High School Principal | Ed.S. | <2 | 8 | 26 |

The experience level of the participants had a range from 13 to 44 years in education, with principals having the least amount of experience and central office staff having the most amount of experience.

*Mr. William Atkins, Superintendent*

William Atkins had been the CEO/Superintendent of Barker County School System for 13 years at the time of this study. This length of time as a superintendent in one system was considerably longer than the average tenure of superintendents nation-wide which was reported to be 5.5 years in 2006 (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). His educational leadership experiences prior to being superintendent included being an assistant principal, principal, and director of a technical college. With 44 years of educational experience, 27 of these years within the Barker County School System and the remaining 17 years in a neighboring system, Atkins had always worked in large school systems. The unusual longevity of his tenure as a superintendent enabled him to improve and to strengthen education in the county, and to start several initiatives. One initiative was the Quality-Plus Leader Academy designed to help develop and to train future school leaders.

As superintendent, Atkins was deeply committed to the development of leaders and building and sustaining a pipeline for the future leadership demands of the system. Paul Garmin, Executive Director of Leadership Development, shared this insight about Atkins:

> Our superintendent spends as much time thinking about leader development [and] succession planning as anything. It's a major issue with him, he tells folks – 'developing leaders, planning for the future is the single most important decision of my superintendency!' That's pretty strong stuff.

Atkins, while speaking of the principalship, emphasized that it was very important for a principal to be both a "good" manager and an instructional leader because "management is doing things

right and leadership is doing right things right." Asserting that the principal was the single most important position in a school, Atkins believed that it was important for principals to "delegate responsibilities, develop a strong leadership team, and prepare future leaders."

Participants in this study repeatedly described Atkins as a visionary leader. His passion and energy for improving school performance surfaced in the comments voiced by principals and central office administrators as they talked about district level leadership. In 2005, Atkins was one of the finalists for the National Superintendent of the Year.

*Dr. Paul Garmin, Executive Director of Leadership Development*

Paul Garmin held a unique position in the Barker County School System. With the title of Executive Director of Leadership Development, Garmin had the responsibility of overseeing the development of future leaders for the system. Garmin explained, "My primary mission has been to elevate leader development [and] leader preparation to a level envisioned by the superintendent of schools." Garmin was the first holder of this position for the Barker County School System and at the time of this study, he had held the position for just over four years. Garmin believed that his job was to put "the Barker County School System leadership development on the top as a model for the nation's school systems."

Throughout his 34-year career in education, Garmin worked as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and he held several central office positions. He felt well-prepared for his present position because of his extensive experience including16 years in human resources and personnel management. Starting work in Barker County in 1983, Garmin had seen the school system go through significant change from 36,000 students to more than 150,000 students. Coupled with the growing student population, Garmin mentioned, "When I came to work, we were 98% Caucasian. Today, the Caucasian student population is more in the 35% to 36% area."

Garmin believed that the most important ingredient to success in developing leaders was having passion and commitment for the work. Reflecting on what he likes about his job, Garmin revealed:

> Since 1983, I've been a part of a school district, of an organization, that has placed value on continuity and consistency; that has placed value on setting the bar very high, and has placed great value on defying conventional wisdom."

Garmin displayed a genuine passion and excitement for his work. He emphasized, "it's truly an exciting time" for leadership development in the Barker County School District.

*Dr. Denise Franklin, Chief Human Resource Officer*

With 26 years of experience in education, Dr. Denise Franklin was the third most experienced administrator participating in this study. Getting her start in a neighboring state teaching in the area of special education, Franklin became inspired to pursue a leadership position when her principal told her she had the capability to be a leader. Her leadership abilities were recognized because of her influence on her fellow teachers who were able to increase the level of mainstreaming the special needs students that Franklin oversaw. Franklin spoke passionately about how she decided to stay in education because she felt "valued and needed" by her students.

Franklin spoke highly of various principals and superintendents who had mentored and encouraged her throughout her career and in particular in her move into leadership. At the time of this study, she had been in the Barker County School District for 16 years, starting as an assistant principal, moving to the principalship, and eventually to human resources. Franklin had been the Chief Human Resource Officer for the past eight years, and like Paul Garmin, she had the opportunity to see the rapid growth and demographic changes that the Barker County School System had experienced.

Dr. Franklin often referred to the "culture" of the Barker County School System as being one where "our schools are in the center," meaning that the mission of all administrative positions in the central office is to provide adequate support to the schools. In turn, Franklin emphasized that as the school leader, the principal "has to take whatever crosses the threshold and exceed expectations when it comes to teaching and learning." As the Chief Human Resource Officer, Dr. Franklin believed her responsibility was to support principals in the task of leading a sound and productive learning organization and to provide the system with the successful recruitment and development of leaders.

*Ms. Randi Martin, Journey Elementary School Principal*

Randi Martin was in her first year as principal at Journey Elementary School. Journey Elementary had just opened up as a new elementary school serving approximately 800 students. Martin had the help of two assistant principals, and she supervised 59 teaching staff and 31 support staff including custodians and cafeteria personnel. Student achievement met the AYP standard for the first year that Journey was open, and she fully acknowledged that it would be several years before she could take full responsibility for her students' academic achievement. At the end of Martin's first year, 85.2% of students taking the state test met or exceeded the standard in math, and 91.3% met or exceeded the standard in reading/language arts.

Martin admitted to being overwhelmed with being a new principal, and she highlighted the additional challenge of opening up a brand new school without prior principal experience. She explained, "one of the most difficult things was that you don't know everything, [you have] no experience of knowing all you should know being a new principal in a new school." In spite of the challenges in keeping up with the high standards set by the system leadership, Martin acknowledged the support that she received from the district. Martin asserted, "I think it's a

tough system, but I don't feel like the system is out to get me, it's all transparent." She also highlighted the "coherence" of the system's communication with the principals, ensuring that "everybody was going in the same direction with a clear picture of the vision, mission, values, and goals of the system."

*Dr. Bruce Villa, Crawford Middle School Principal*

Bruce Villa, like Randi Martin, was in his first year as principal at Crawford Middle School at the time of this study. Villa was the fourth principal to serve the Crawford school community since opening in 1997. With an enrollment of over 1,300 students, Crawford was one of the highest achieving middle schools in the state with 96.8% of students meeting or exceeding the state standard in math, and 98.6% meeting or exceeding the state standards in language arts. Crawford Middle School has received numerous awards for high student achievement on the state and national levels.

Villa was responsible for over 120 teachers and more than 27 support staff. There were three assistant principals on the administrative team, all new to Crawford Middle School. The teaching staff had low turnover, giving stability to the instructional program at Crawford. Villa acknowledged that, "there is a very high level of expectations for the students, the staff, and certainly the administrative team here." Villa stressed that he did "feel [the] pressure to improve on an already high achieving school."

Balancing personal life as a husband and a father with the professional life as a principal was a challenge for Villa. Expressing his priorities, Villa stated, "In my opinion, there isn't a job that's worth the cost of my family or my health. I have to balance the expectations and the responsibilities of being a principal now with my family and my health." Recognizing his priorities, it was evident that Villa was driven to find success as an instructional leader. He

stated, “The most important thing I am doing is making sure that I have qualified teachers, and not just minimally qualified: I want expert instructors engaging kids.”

*Ms. Diane Davidson, Barrymore High School Principal*

Diane Davidson was in her second year as principal at Barrymore High School. Unlike Randi Martin and Bruce Villa, Davidson had worked as an assistant principal for six years at the school that she eventually led as principal. Barrymore High School was a high achieving school with 3,500 students. Since it opened in 1981, Barrymore’s enrollment tripled in size and at the time of this study, Barrymore had 12 assistant principals and over 225 teachers. Defying the theory that small schools produce higher student achievement than larger schools, Barrymore led the Barker County School District in SAT scores and ranked 13$^{th}$ in the state with more students taking the SAT than all but one of the top 12 ranked high schools in the state. Barrymore also met AYP with 96.7% of the students taking the high school graduation test in language arts meeting or exceeding the standard and 94.3% met or exceeded on the graduation test in math. For the second indicator for AYP, Barrymore reported a graduation rate of 95.7%.

Davidson identified the length of the work week as a challenge. Being at the high school, her job responsibilities as principal presented a large demand on her time. There were often weeks where she was required to be at the school four out of the five week-nights, and on week-ends, to support athletic events and special program activities. Davidson explained:

> I’m here at 6:30 every morning and there are some nights I don’t leave until really late, it’s rarely less than a 12 hour day. Maybe some principals handle that differently, but in this community, it’s important that you’re seen; it’s important that you’re showing that you’re supporting all programs. That may not necessarily be the case in every community, but this is a very demanding community.

Davidson admitted that she needed to learn how to control her schedule, so she could have more personal time to balance her life; however, she felt strongly that it was important for the principal of Barrymore be "seen at all events."

Davidson shared that the most important part of her job was supporting teachers. She saw herself more as a servant leader (Autry, 2001) to her teachers. Davidson asserted, "We bend over backwards to get them [teachers] what they need, and in return I think they're really appreciative. I think some folks [principals] rule with more of an authoritative figure – that's not me."

## Findings

The goals of the study were to identify the nature, characteristics, and practices of the succession of principals in a select Georgia school system through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants. To assist in developing an understanding of the participants' experiences with principal succession, perspectives of the challenges to the principalship were identified as a thematic category. Next, thematic categories associated with socialization, professional development, supervision and evaluation, and succession were identified and used to form descriptions of the experiences of the participants. The six participants in the Barker County School System were each interviewed four times using protocols addressing socialization, professional development, supervision and evaluation, and succession. From each transcript, themes were determined by identifying general units of meaning followed by further reduction through labeling of units of meaning relevant to the research questions (Hycner, 1985).

### Challenges Associated with the Principalship

The principalship has become more complex as increasing accountability for school and student performance is coupled with traditional role responsibilities (Cooley & Shen, 2003). In

addition, demands related to demographic changes and meeting the needs of a rapidly growing technology-based society have created challenges for principals (Crow, 2006). The purpose of this study was to examine how principals and central office leaders experience succession as individuals move into the role and responsibilities of the principalship. To establish a deep understanding of the experiences of the participants, challenges related to the succession into the role of principal in the Barker County School System were examined.

The Barker County School System participants identified numerous challenges associated with succession into the work represented by the role requirements of the principalship. The responses provided a framework for understanding the challenges perceived by principals and central office leaders based on three sub-themes: expectations, role management, and required skills (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

*Challenges of Succession*

| Sub-theme | Dominant Codes |
|---|---|
| Expectations | System expectations<br>Community expectations |
| Skills | Role management<br>Developing leadership capacity<br>Dealing with adult issues<br>Developing and maintaining a vision |

To construct the main theme of "challenges," the three sub-themes (i.e., expectations, skills, and role management) overlapped, and codes were often interrelated. Both central office leaders and principals identified common sub-themes indicating an alignment in the recognition of the challenges facing principals as they succeeded into the position.

The dominant codes supporting the sub-theme of expectations were system and community demands. The system expected principals to close the achievement gap and to meet the high standards for student achievement and role performance. Community growth and increased diversity made demands on principals to address changing demographics. Both system and community expectations overlapped as changing demographics increased the challenge of closing the achievement gap among sub groups, particularly in high-poverty and non-English speaking populations. In addition, communities demanded the presence of the principal at school events and community activities that surrounded the school.

Specific skills emerged in the dominant codes that presented challenges for individuals as they succeeded into the role of principal. The abilities required to develop leadership capacity, deal with adult issues while creating and maintaining a vision were identified as challenges that new principals faced in their new positions as the school leader.

Role management emerged as a sub-theme in the area of challenges for new principals. Dominant codes revealed challenges found in the balancing of the job with personal life and setting priorities among the many demands of the job. While the dominant codes overlapped, participants often cited the setting of priorities and balancing personal life as separate entities; one being on a personal and global level and the other being embedded in the daily demands of the job.

*Expectations*

Expectations set by the district as well as the community were identified as challenges to principals in Barker County. Central office leaders and principals participating in the study agreed that there were high expectations for student achievement and consistent presence in the community with positive professional behaviors that were conducive to strong school leadership.

*System expectations.*

Central office leaders described the challenge of meeting high standards, the expectation that the achievement gap would be closed, and that principals are expected to be on the job constantly and consistently. As Garmin stated:

> I think the challenge is our expectations are so very high. If you are appointed to the principalship, you know the bar is set very high. You know that you are on the job 24/7. We talk about expectations of the community, we talk about whether you like it or not – you are on the job 24/7. So, don't expect that you can go to the liquor store like everyone else. Don't expect that you can go to neighborhood bar like everyone else.

In addition to the expectation that principals were held to a higher standard regarding their work ethic and moral behavior, there was the challenge of meeting the academic standards set by the system. Middle school principal Bruce Villa explained:

> Three or four years down the road, I will be here based on how well I have accomplished what I was instructed to do when I came here. I do not think they [central office] have a short memory. I think ultimately I have got to get the job done, and to the degree that I am able to do that, if it is sufficiently low enough, I will not be here anymore. There's no question in my mind they will move me out.

The principals in the study identified the challenge of meeting the expectation that they would "defy conventional wisdom" by increasing academic achievement and closing the achievement gap as the number of students in subgroups in the areas of race, special needs, free and reduced lunch, and non-English speaking populations grew with the increasing diversity of the system. Principal Randi Martin stated, "One of our challenges across the county is to lower that achievement gap between your black and white students and your black and Hispanic students." Closing the achievement gap was underlined as a challenge by Bruce Villa stating "our definition of success is improved student achievement. . . . There is a very high level of expectation for the students, the staff, and certainly the administrative team."

*Community expectations.*

The communities the schools served also presented high expectations of principals. Described as a cultural norm of the Barker County community, the expectations for high student achievement and educators who were active in the community were evident in the responses of the participants. Paul Garmin explained, "A part of our culture, part of our history, is that community in Barker has always had very high expectations for education in general and educational leaders specifically." Parents and other community members were quick to hold principals and teachers accountable for the learning taking place in the school. When talking about how his success as a principal is measured, Bruce Villa stated, "It's based on my kids' achievement scores, and in some sense the community's satisfaction with what we're doing here. That's it."

In addition, the community expected principals to be present at all school functions and to be active members in the community. High School Principal Davidson explained:

> In this community, it is important that you are seen. It's important that you are supporting all programs. . . . there is a lot of pressure from the community to keep the academics where they are. If we don't, then we will lose our community.

The demands for their presence in the community was not mentioned by Bruce Villa or Randi Martin at the middle and elementary school levels, indicating that community demands for presence at school functions were more prevalent at the high school level where there were more activities and events held outside regular school hours.

An unintentional demand of the community was the changing demographics resulting in increased diversity. The county had grown considerably and had moved from being a suburban school system to a large urban system resulting in a higher number of students coming from families living in poverty and non-English speaking environments. When compared to other

school systems in the state, Paul Garmin stressed, "Barker is the district that has changed rather dramatically and rapidly demographically."

The change in demographics presented a significant challenge in continuing to close the achievement gap among subgroups identified by the state AYP standards. In 2002, 58% of the student population was White, whereas in 2008, 36% of the student population was White. There had been a dramatic growth of minorities in the county, particularly in the Asian, Black, and Hispanic populations (see Table 4.9).

The challenge presented to principals was to continue to close the achievement gap that typically exists with the subgroup populations of minority students, students receiving free and reduced lunch, students with disabilities, and limited English proficient students. The Executive Director of Leadership Development, Paul Garmin, explained:

> The numbers of population subgroups seem to grow with Barker. One of the challenges is to defy the conventional wisdom which says as your student population becomes more diverse, as the number of free and reduced lunch children grows, and as you deal with more children from poverty, all the measures of student achievement seem to go down.

Principals saw their challenge as being able to continue closing the achievement gap with all subgroups as the Barker County School System had been able to do the past four years (see Table 4.4). Diane Davidson reflected on the challenge presented by the demographic change at Barrymore High School, and she shared:

> I think ever-increasing demands and pressure put on principals for their schools to achieve is a challenge. We are in a good community. We are in a changing community. Demographically we're changing. When I came here in '96, there were about 2600 kids, and I'm guessing we were probably 92% White. Now we're 60% White, but we've continued to meet or to exceed where we've been in the past, which a lot of folks did not think we would be able to do. I think because our change has been somewhat gradual, we've been able to embrace that change, but with the very increasing demands of AYP, I'm not so sure that any school will be able to meet the standards that they're asking us to meet.

Bruce Villa saw the trials and tribulations of closing achievement gap in the middle school as a "renewed challenge every year [as] we get different kids." In addition, the expectations principals felt from central office to continue the success of the past was noted, "Mr. Atkins has made it very clear that his expectations are that we kick things up a notch; that we become even that much better, and that's what we are working on doing," shared Bruce Villa.

Table 4.9

*Demographic Changes from 2002 to 2008*

| | | 2002 | 2008 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Enrollment | | 109,603 | 154,901 |
| Subgroups | | | |
| | Asian | 9% | 10% |
| | Black | 18% | 27% |
| | Hispanic | 12% | 22% |
| | Native American | 0% | 0% |
| | White | 58% | 36% |
| | Mixed Race | 2% | 4% |
| Other Subgroups | | | |
| | Students with Disabilities | 11% | 11% |
| | Free and Reduced Lunch | 21% | 41% |
| | Limited English Proficient | 8% | 15% |

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

*Skills*

The Barker County School System had clearly identified the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for effective school leadership. Using skills and abilities defined by the Gallup Organization (Rath & Conchie, 2008), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, n.d), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, n.d.), the

Barker County School System framed recruitment and selection criteria and development curricula to ensure that leaders succeeding into the principalship would be successful.

When asked about the preparation received from the system to move into the principalship, Villa stated, "I can't imagine doing it better than what Barker County is doing." Davidson commented:

> The work that I did in the class that I took through the *Quality Plus Leader Academy* was valuable as far as leadership [development] is concerned. It gave me some very practical applications. It was a very eye opening experience into the world of being a Principal.

While the participating principals valued their experiences in their preparation to become principals, the skills in developing leadership capacity, dealing with adult issues, and developing a shared vision were identified as challenges.

*Role management.*

The recognition of the role and the management of the demands of the role were identified as a major challenge by central office leaders and principals. Atkins, the superintendent of Barker County, when speaking of the challenges for principals explained, "You have got to be comfortable with chaos, quite frankly." The suggestion that the job of principal is complex and difficult to manage was reiterated by the principals who shared concerns about the information that "gets showered down on principals" and the "sense of frustration . . . that it's too much to handle at one time."

The chaotic nature of the job presented the challenge of finding a balance between personal life and professional life. The time involvement to complete tasks for most principals was a challenge. High School principal Davidson shared:

> The most difficult aspect for me is all the time [being principal] that is involved. Last week, I was out four nights. This week I am in pretty good shape [because] I am only out two nights, but I was looking at my calendar for the week after that, and I have four

> nights . . . I am here at 6:30 every morning and there some nights that I do not leave here until really late. It is rarely less than a 12-hour day.

The setting of priorities, learning to delegate to others, and having the discipline to balance the job demands with personal life were seen as significant challenges that new principals faced in the Barker County School System. The recognition of balancing the demands of the job with personal life was a challenge that was shared by central office administrators. Garmin, Executive Director of Leadership Development, saw the balancing of the many demands of the job as being the "most difficult thing about being a new principal."

*Developing leadership capacity.*

The development of leadership capacity was a challenge for the principals. All principals interviewed had recently succeeded into their roles, with Martin and Villa being in their first year as principal, and Davidson in her second year as principal. As new principals, developing leadership among the staff was seen as both a challenge and an expectation.

The ability to select people to share leadership roles and responsibilities was seen as essential to the success of principals. The importance of distributing leadership was underscored by Superintendent Atkins:

> Most first year principals who fail to really live up to expectations, [if] you go back and check, they did not have a strong leadership team. . . . You better surround yourself with people who are better and smarter than you and build that coalition where you get done what needs to get done.

Executive Director of Human Resources, Dr. Denise Franklin, explained, "Principals have to select the right leadership people to work with. Principals can't do it all, and that challenge comes in selecting the right people." Finding the "right people" to build leadership capacity meant having the ability to disperse the responsibilities of leadership to others in the school.

Principals expressed difficulty in learning how to delegate responsibility to their staff. The "letting go" of certain tasks was a challenge, as High School Principal Davidson explained:

> I think one of the most difficult things is having to let go of the day-to-day operations of the school. Yes, you're ultimately responsible for that, but being away from the building as much are of the daily grind that you normally take care of. . . . I had a difficult time with time management. It wore me out. I was trying to do everything.

Learning who to delegate to and what to delegate was cited as a challenge as Bruce Villa stated, "I have to learn to delegate. You have to delegate a lot of stuff, but there are some things I can't delegate." Diane Davidson expressed, "You have got to get to a point where you trust in your people; that they are going to get the job done for you."

*Dealing with adult issues.*

The anticipatory socialization (McGough, 2003) of principals was evident in the words of Martin, "you do your job, and do it well, and do the right thing—that's how I was raised." Holding the personal standard that had been ingrained in her from childhood through family values and work ethic, Martin found it challenging when coming to the realization that not all teachers shared the same values, work ethic, or social interaction skills that she had. Martin offered:

> I think the most challenging thing, whether it's an assistant principal, or principal, is honestly dealing with these adult issues. I mean, I hate to say that, but it is shocking to me still today. I told my assistant principals when I hired them, 'I am just going to tell you that a lot of your time, unfortunately, will be spent on adult issues not kid issues. It's a sad thing, but it's true. And so I think that's a difficult thing—having to deal with adults that just should do their job like they're supposed to.

Principals identified challenges in understanding that how they understood the world of teaching and parenting may be different than the teachers that they supervised and the parents they interacted with on a daily basis. When asked about aspects of the job that really took a lot of energy and time, Bruce Villa offered, "As a principal now, that's how I spend a lot of my time –

dealing with personnel. . . .That is probably the area that I have not had as much training as I would like."

Unlike Randi Martin at Journey Elementary School and Bruce Villa at Crawford Middle School, Diane Davidson at Barrymore High School found that issues with parents were a challenge, not issues with teachers. Speaking of challenges from demanding parents, particularly in the area of special education, Davidson described the frustration and time involved in dealing with disgruntled parents:

> I've already dealt with more parents this year than I dealt with the entire year last year. I have about five extremely demanding parents, and with 3,542 kids, that doesn't really seem like a lot. Four of those issues are Special Ed. issues that are either about to go through due process or [are in] active process. There are attorneys involved, and it's, in my opinion, parents and advocates who are extremely, extremely unreasonable. They are, just not very nice, and I spend my time, a lot of my time, on these particular things when I could be spending my time on 3500 other kids, and that's what gets frustrating.

Davidson saw her primary role as principal as being a support to her teachers. She believed that her job was to "do what I can to make sure that people enjoy coming to work every day."

The difference in adult issues between Davidson and both Martin and Villa could be related to the longevity of service at the school. Davidson was in her second year as principal of Barrymore High School, and prior her succession into the principalship, she served as an assistant principal at Barrymore for six years allowing greater familiarity with the teaching staff. Martin and Villa were both in their first year as principal and were new to the school communities of Journey Elementary School and Crawford Middle School, placing them in an environment where they were *becoming* familiar with their staff.

*Developing and maintaining a vision.*

The establishment of a vision centered on instruction was the most significant challenge described by central office leaders. The necessity of having a clear vision was emphasized

through the need to have a strong unwavering focus on student achievement. While the vision of instructional leadership for the system was clear, it was seen as important that the same vision was reinforced at the school level. Atkins, the superintendent, stated:

> First of all, we want our principals to be the instructional leaders of the school. . . . He [principal] has to be perceived as conveying a message and exhibiting the passion he has for what we are here for—teaching and learning.

Atkins defined a "good principal" as one who is able "to articulate what an effective instructional program is and why we're doing this."

In speaking of challenges for new principals, Chief Human Resource Officer, Dr. Franklin, expressed the need for dispersing a vision throughout the school, and obtaining "buy-in" from the faculty. Franklin explained:

> You [the principal] have got to get people on your leadership team engaged in what your vision is for that school, what it is we are supposed to be about, and getting them engaged in your philosophy, your vision, working with them to create what we want the school to look like and then getting them committed to that.

While establishing a vision focused on instruction was seen as a challenge, the maintenance of the vision was seen as equally significant. Executive Director of Leadership Development, Paul Garmin, emphasized:

> I think the greatest challenge that person [principal] has is to continue to keep the staff, community, and the students focused on teaching and learning, making sure that we keep the eye on the ball, as opposed to the many other things that compete for our time and interest.

Maintaining a focus on a vision with an emphasis on teaching and learning while also being responsible for many other tasks involved in leading a school was a challenge. Having multiple demands competing for time and attention was a common issue that caused these principals to struggle with the management of their role as leaders.

Principals and central office leaders in the Barker County School System identified similar challenges of succeeding into the principalship. There was congruence between central office leaders and principals in the belief that the job of the principalship was complex and demanding in nature, and acquiring specific skills, learning to deal with high expectations, and learning to manage the role were all challenges that new principals faced.

## Succession Planning – A Sense of Urgency

The Barker County School System central office leaders expressed a sense of urgency regarding the succession of principals. Dr. Paul Garmin, Executive Director of Leadership Development explained, "We no longer can wait until a principal has been in the job for a year to determine whether he will be successful. We need to know he will be successful when we hire him." There were two sub-themes indicating that the system had a sense of urgency: 1) identification of workforce trends; and 2) the development of a pipeline for future leaders (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10

*Sense of Urgency for Succession Planning*

| Sub-theme | Dominant Codes |
|---|---|
| Workforce Trends | County growth<br>Attrition<br>Applicant pool |
| Pipeline Development | Recruitment and selection practices<br>Internal leadership development |

As a community that continued to experience significant growth (see Table 4.8) and had numerous principals who were eligible to retire, Barker County School System central office

leaders expressed a sense of urgency in establishing practices that would ensure a pipeline of effective leaders for the future.

*Workforce Trends*

Three dominant codes illustrated the theme of workforce trends as participants shared their experiences with principal succession. The growth of the county was consistently mentioned by all participants as being an issue that resulted in succession within the principal workforce. Related to growth was attrition as new schools were built and principals became eligible to retire or were moved from one school to another as new schools opened. Attrition was cited as the reason for concern about principal succession. Finally, the applicant pool strength was cited as being an important component that had to be considered related to succession.

*County growth.*

The growth in the county population required the school system to open 10 additional schools in 2009-2010. In addition, there were 13-14 anticipated retirements of current sitting principals giving a projected total of vacancies in the principalship of 23 to 24 positions (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

*Potential Principal Openings for 2009-2010 School Year*

| Reason for Opening | Number of Principals |
|---|---|
| New schools projected to open | 10 |
| Number of principals eligible to retire | 13-14 |
| Total potential principal openings | 23-24 |

*Attrition.*

The concern over attrition was not identified as being the retention of leaders leaving to go to other systems, but was founded in the realization that with 105 schools, there were going to be a potential for principal retirements or principals moving into central office positions. Executive Director of Human Resources, Dr. Denise Franklin, explained, "We rarely have a leader in Barker County as a principal to leave our district and go somewhere else to be a principal. We may have had maybe three or four during my tenure." Franklin was in her ninth year as the Executive Director of Human Resources at the time of the study. Dr. Paul Garmin, Executive Director of Leadership Development, stated:

> Have I seen anything significant in terms that there are more people leaving, not retiring, [but] leaving for other jobs? No. I don't know that there is a trend that I can say is happening. Historically, we've been fortunate that we've had fairly low turnover due to moves, due to [people] seeking other job opportunities.

Retirements, principals moving into other principalships within the county, and promotions to central office were the dominant reasons for attrition of school leaders in the Barker County School System.

The Barker County School System kept close watch on the number of years of public education service principals had. Garmin described how important it was to keep "on top" of the numbers of principals who were eligible to retire:

> We are like everyone else of course in that we're dealing with and have dealt with for the past several years now—the baby boomer generation and early retirements. Principals retire at 52-53-54 years of age. But again, we plan for it; we have thought about it. As I often tell people, William Atkins was appointed superintendent on Friday evening and I met with him on Saturday morning, the first day of his administration, to talk about succession planning. I remember very clearly that Saturday morning, the data that I reviewed with him was pending retirements, pending new school growths, how many principals, how many assistant principals we were looking at retirement, and how many leaders we were going to need in a 5-year period.

Atkins was appointed as the superintendent of the Barker County School System 13 years prior to the study. Since that time, central office leaders had been tracking the experiences of principals as Garmin further described:

> If we have a vacancy, we knew of that vacancy before it became available; it's not a surprise. We know today those people that could be retiring three years from now, and we talk about it . . . not that we go to them and ask them if that's when they are going to retire, but they know that we track retirement data. We track their years of experience. It's easy for me to say that in the middle of July 2009 that we are going to be conducting training for 75-85 new assistant principals. It's why I can say pretty confidently that next August we are going to be looking at 17 to 22 or 23 new principals.

With a principal workforce of 105, there was a constant concern about retirements. The Barker County School System was proactive in keeping up with potential retirements by looking at the data found in the personnel files of each individual principal. The strategy used to prepare for retirements was to use the longevity data on principals and staff the leadership academy based on the projected retirement possibilities and the number of new schools that were anticipated to open. This data was not made available to the researcher as it was confidential in nature. The monitoring of potential retirement trends was further described by Davidson:

> For every principal in our district, I can tell you exactly how many years they have been in. I cannot tell you when they are going to retire because if people have 30 years, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are going to retire, but it means that people are going to think about it somewhere around that window.

The practice of monitoring the years of principal service was seen as succession planning by the participants; however, keeping track of when principals were eligible to retire is identified as "replacement planning" or "head-counting" in the private sector (Rothwell, 2005). Replacement planning is an important part of human resource management and supports organizational succession planning (Kesler, 2002; Rothwell, 2005).

*Applicant pool.*

The strength of the applicant pool was seen as an issue that required attention by the system in planning for succession. While there were significant numbers of individuals who held certifications to be school leaders, it was believed that the number of quality principals who could handle the job was limited. Franklin offered:

> I think you see a trend now of a large number of people who have the credentials. The state probably has 30,000 people who have the credentials, and I will be the first to tell you because a person has matriculated through some kind of program be it online or a program where they are in the chair, it does not matter. Because they matriculated the program, they passed all assessments, and they have the license in hand does not mean that they are prepared to be a leader in public education today.

Davidson's observation was aligned with the current national trends in the principal workforce where superintendents across the nation have commented that the shortage of candidates for the principalship is not found in the number of people that are certified, but instead, is found in the number of people who actually have the skills, abilities, and knowledge to be effective as a principal (Roza, 2003).

Certification requirements for school leaders in Georgia were changed in 2008 in an effort to ensure that individuals moved into leadership positions after they received their initial leadership certification (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, n.d.). To become eligible to hold an initial certification, candidates must have been selected and employed by the system as a leader. The new rule stipulates, "Upon selection and employment in a leadership position, educational leaders will hold Non-Renewable Leadership (NPL) certificate" (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, n.d., section 4(a), ¶ 2). The initial Non-Renewable Leadership (NL) certification was aligned with preparation programs at the Masters level. Once selected for a leadership position, candidates would hold a Non-Renewable Performance-Based Leadership (NPL) for up to five years during which time they would have the opportunity to

complete a Professional Standards Commission (PSC)-approved performance-based leadership program at the Specialist Level (L-6) or Doctoral Level (L-7).

The new Georgia leadership certification rule was seen as a potential barrier to Barker County School System's control over the applicant pool. Paul Garmin stated:

> I am concerned that certification changes could possibly be a barrier in a future. I am concerned that we are experimenting with getting people quickly into school leadership, and it may not be the most effective way to get people into school leadership. . . . I do see that as a potential barrier down the road. For the past 25-30 years, we've been able to monitor the quality and the quantity of people in the pipeline.

While the change in requirements for certification did not take away the system's ability to select potential candidates, the new rule was perceived by Garmin as diminishing the amount of control that the system had over developing an applicant pool. Additional levels of training and formal degree obtainment dictated by the state posed a potential deterrent for people initially interested in pursuing leadership positions.

One of the goals of the new certification rules was to address the number of individuals who were earning leadership certificates but not going into leadership positions. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (2009) reported, "From July 1, 2006, through June 30, 2009, the GaPSC processed 5,714 upgrades based on advanced leadership degrees. . . . As of June 30, 2009, just under 25% of those 5,714 educators obtaining leadership degrees were employed in a leadership position" (p. 6). The data from the PSC indicated that there was an ample pool of people that had the necessary credentials; however, there were considerably fewer people who did not succeed into a leadership position.

The new changes in the certification rule was seen as a step in eliminating people who were not interested in pursuing a leadership position from getting a leadership certificate. Superintendent Atkins confirmed that the recent changes in certification rules would help

alleviate the number of individuals obtaining a leadership certificate but who did not intend to go into leadership positions. Atkins reiterated, "I think this [certificate rule] was created out of desire of people getting paid for leadership certificate and no one intends to be a leader."

To add to the problem of a glutton of people who had certificates but did not intend to go into leadership positions, there was a concern about the quality of people who possessed a leadership certificate. Denise Franklin explained:

> You have a significant amount of people with the appropriate credentials; they meet the minimum criteria credential-wise, but you will find that that pool many times lacks those essential things that we feel leaders need to have to be successful in today's schools.

The comments from Franklin echo the concerns of superintendents across the United States about the shortage of principal candidates who have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to be effective in leading schools (Roza, 2003).

In addition to the quality of principals, there was a concern about the need to draw more principals to the high school level. Superintendent Atkins stated, "I am beginning to see less of what I would call real passion for being a high school principal." Passion for the job was seen as an important quality for applicants to have, especially for those positions with the greatest demands.

The challenges presented by workforce trends included finding people who were interested in taking positions in at-risk settings. Dr. Franklin, the Chief Human Resource Officer, explained:

> So you have some challenges in staffing some of those schools [lower socioeconomic] because of the whole scope of what a leader needs to do in a school like that. . . . The perception is the work is harder, you need [to be] more edgy, you need more commitment, it's more time, it's more intense, and the workload is greater. The core business of teaching and learning and the accountability is totally different in a school like that.

The challenge of staffing more diverse schools with larger poverty populations was a concern in the Barker County School System as the demographics continued to change resulting in a higher percentage of students coming from impoverished environments (see Table 4.9).

In developing a pipeline for future principals, attention was given to the depth and strength of the assistant principal applicant pool. Principals in the study felt that the applicant pool for assistant principals was strong and improving in quality. Diane Davidson offered:

> I know they're concerned about the applicant pool for the assistant principalship. I think it's getting better. As a matter of fact, I did screenings on Thursday, and we screened 10 people that day, and there were a couple of really good candidates.

Bruce Villa explained, "First off, there's a large applicant pool. . . . I think it's very strong." Villa had recently hired an assistant principal, and he shared:

> We hired a great candidate, and I'm very happy that she's here. However, I have great confidence that if, for whatever reason, she had said 'no,' we would have been able to find another one as qualified, as good of a fit, and as able to do the job.

Having over 500 assistant principals already in the Barker County School System helped strengthen the applicant pool for assistant principals as Randi Martin explained:

> When we were replacing assistant principals, I thought it was a pretty strong pool because again, you're interviewing existing Assistant Principals who are just looking to change levels to get different experience or honestly, in a county of this size, to get closer to home. That can be a pretty strong pool of people.

The lateral movement of assistant principals helped increase both the size and quality of the principal applicant pool in the Barker County School System and helped reinforce the practice of hiring predominantly from a pool of internal candidates as Davidson expressed, "We like to grow our own."

*Pipeline Development*

The Barker County School System responded to the sense of urgency for succession planning through developing a pool of applicants that served as a pipeline to the assistant

principal and principal positions. The proactive stance of the central office leaders was described briefly by Superintendent Atkins:

> I think you cannot leave it [succession] to chance. You just cannot leave it up to people to come and apply. Succession planning means you have somebody in mind. What do we need to do to get this person ready?

Similar to the literature o succession in the business sector, Atkins described two elements essential to effective succession planning: 1) identification of talent, and 2) development of talent (Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Groves, 2007).

*Recruitment and selection practices*

The Barker County School System preferred to hire internal candidates over external candidates and used self-selection and tapping as methods in identifying potential applicants for school leadership positions. While principals revealed that they believed that it was their responsibility to develop leadership with assistant principals and lead teachers, central office leaders shared that principals should give more attention identifying potential candidates for leadership positions. The Executive Director of Human Resources, Dr. Franklin, explained:

> I think the leaders in our schools, our principals, see the need for a succession plan, but I do not think that they have the ownership that we would like for them to have. If you are in a high school and you have ten assistant principals, and if you come in and submit your resignation, you have to be able to come and say, 'I have four people I have been working with and any of them can take my job.'

Contrary to Franklin's comment on principals not having ownership in the succession process, the principals in the study revealed that they felt a responsibility in developing leaders to be ready to move into the principalship. When asked if he provided professional development for his assistant principals, middle school principal, Villa, responded:

> Absolutely, and in fact, not only do I consider that I provide it [professional development], but I also consider it a key component of my job. I have a responsibility in some sense to be preparing my assistant principals to be principals.

High school principal, Diane Davidson, stated:

> I have three people, really four people who have Principal aspirations. When I can, I try to pull them in and let them watch what I'm doing. For instance, one of my guys wanted to see what I did with budget, how I handled budget, and how I allotted money to departments, so I brought him in and showed him that whole process. He sat down and watched me sign checks and all the paperwork that I sign on Thursday mornings. He wanted to see that process so I let him spend a couple of days with me while I did that.

Randi Martin, Elementary School Principal, elaborated:

> I see part of my responsibility is to share anything that I know with my administrators so that if that's something they feel like they want to do, that I have somehow contributed or helped them along that path. I don't think everyone wants to be a principal and that's fine, but I think it's my responsibility to share with them any experiences and opportunities that I can.

Principals in the Barker County School System indicated that they embraced the responsibility in developing assistant principals for the principalship; however, they did not see it as part of a tapping strategy that would prepare assistant principals for their specific job as principal. The idea of someone being capable of taking over if they were to leave their position was not clearly addressed by the principals interviewed. At the time of the study, all three principals interviewed were in the first two years of their first principalship, perhaps diminishing the sense of urgency for a succession plan for their own positions.

The Barker County School System presented a clear description of the attributes of a "Quality-Plus Leader" that was sought after when identifying potential leadership candidates (see Table 4.12). To determine if candidates had the necessary attributes to be considered for leadership positions, several sources of data were examined. Recommendations from sitting principals, a diagnostic instrument from the Gallup Organization Principal Insight, multiple screening interviews, and observations were all sources of data as system leaders determined the attributes of potential candidates.

Table 4.12

*Quality-Plus Leader Attributes*

| A Barker County School System Quality-Plus Leader: |
|---|
| Focuses on results<br>Views accountability as a value<br>Passionately exhibits the three "E's"<br>• Has high Energy<br>• Energizes others<br>• Executes by consistently turning vision into desired results<br>Leads by example<br>Builds and values relationships |

Recommendations from sitting principals were seen as an important component to selecting individuals for entrance into the Quality-Plus Leader Academy. William Atkins explained:

> [We] let them [principals] know what's coming up, encourage them to be part of it, but we are also asking them to make sure that their encouragement carries the responsibility, that is the responsibility that they are really signing off these people. That they really recommend them, not that they just have to be their favorite person and they've been here and they've paid their dues, it's their time, and they need to be a principal.

Having a clear understanding by sitting principals of what the system sees as a Quality-Plus Leader was critical in the process of asking for recommendations for future candidates.

Diagnostic tools from the Gallup Organization's Principal Insight and assessment centers were a source of data used in determining the attributes of potential candidates. Bruce Villa reflected on his experience becoming a candidate for school leadership, "You have to have taken a Gallup poll Principal Insight. It's a survey where your responses are judged against effective leaders elsewhere and you're given a score." Paul Garmin described the emphasis on using established criteria in the selection process like this:

> We talk about attitudes, dispositions, or talents. We think about the work with the Gallup organization. We think a lot about skills when we talk about our work with assessment centers and NAESP and NASSP's definition of skills, and how they describe what the principal should know and be able to do. More recently, just this past few work days, we have been having the opportunity to discuss and converse these competencies with other thought leaders in the field.

The establishment of a clear understanding of the competencies needed to be an effective school leader was identified in the literature as being a critical component of the selection and hiring process (Kesler, 2002; Rothwell, 2005).

Multiple screening interviews were conducted in the selection process for school leaders in the Barker County School System. Screening committees were comprised of area superintendents, human resource personnel, and principals. Randi Martin described the initial screening experience when she shared:

> For the initial screening you go before a panel. There's an elementary, middle, and high school sitting principal involved in the panel. There is at least one representative from human resources, and then I believe two other county office personnel. That is a very standard screening where there is a set list of questions. Everyone that goes through that screening is asked exactly the same questions, and then afterward there is a written exercise where you are given a situation and you respond in writing to that situation.

The initial screening was to determine if an individual was to be placed in the applicant pool. Once a principalship position opened, an additional screening was done to determine selection. Martin explained, "I had a three person interview at that point where the questions became more specific and it was just a more individualized interview." Dr. Denise Franklin, the Executive Director of Human Resources, added:

> So, the applicant comes in and then an interview with us at that point for a specific school, everything else to that point has been a general application; we are looking for a specific match for a specific community, specific school, specific level.

The importance of finding the right match between skills and attributes and specific needs of a school was evident in the second round of screening in the selection of principals.

Central office leaders have the opportunity to assess the pool of candidates in the Quality-Plus Leader Academy as simulations, discussions about case studies, and general observations occur at each monthly meeting. Paul Garmin felt that observing candidates during the Quality-Plus Leader Academy activities allowed central office leaders to identify individuals "who have given us reason to believe that they possess a number of skills that we've deemed important to principalship." The superintendent, area superintendents, directors of leadership development, chief academic officer, and the chief human resource officer were present at all Quality-Plus Leader Academy sessions to observe and to deliver training.

*Internal leadership development.*

The Quality-Plus Leader Academy was seen as a critical component in developing leadership talent. Principals in the Barker County School System saw the Quality-Plus Leader Academy as the main way central office leaders developed a pipeline and managed succession. When asked about the planning of succession into the principalship, High School Principal Diane Davidson, stated, "obviously our plans are [the] Quality-Plus Leader Academy." Middle School Principal, Villa, stated:

> My understanding is the Quality-Plus Leader Academy is a training opportunity where they are attempting to identify people with leadership potential and develop that potential to prepare them to take the seat of principal as the system has openings. If there is a succession plan, it has to be deeply rooted in the Quality-Plus Leader Academy.

The selection of succeeding principals was still based on identified skills, abilities, and the desired fit for a given vacancy. As Villa explained, "Just because you are in the Quality-Plus Leader Academy doesn't mean you're going to be principal." Randi Martin, on the other hand, felt that the Quality-Plus Leader Academy was what the Barker County School System used to develop a pipeline to the principalship, and those who entered the academy should expect to be placed if the fit was right. Martin offered:

> At the onset of the Leadership Academy it's made pretty clear that the intention is if you go through this and you are successful, that you will likely be placed in a principalship as one becomes available. So they gave you the warning up front if being a principal is not what you want, because theoretically within 12 months, maybe sooner, you could be placed.

Selecting candidates for future principal positions was strategic, and Dr. Denise Franklin explained:

> I could pull any principal in the district and tell you that based on our data when they are eligible for retirement and we begin to staff our academy based on what we think those needs are going to be. For example, the academy will have an equal number [to the number of potential openings]. We try to make sure that if you have 9 elementary school [principal positions] coming open next year, and you have 4 middle school principals who are eligible for retirement, you definitely don't want to put 25 high school principal [candidates] in the academy. You need to be filling the academy based on what your projected needs are going to be because you will need people to succeed these people once they move out or if they should transition out.

Paul Garmin identified that the purpose of the academy was to have "the supply meet the demand" for new school leaders.

A collaborative relationship with university preparation programs served as a strategy to identify talent, recruit that talent, and develop a pipeline for leadership. The Barker County School System found opportunity to identify and recruit candidates through local university preparation programs by having central office leaders and principals teach as part-time faculty. Collaborative relations with universities were described by Denise Franklin, Chief Human Resource Officer, when she shared:

> We have cohort relationships with all of our universities. We partner with those universities in the leadership preparation programs and that allows us to do is help with the selection of people to go into those programs. We teach some of those classes, in fact I teach several of the classes. Those partnerships allow us to really look at leadership development of those students, most of whom are teachers.

The partnership with universities assisted the Barker County School System in identifying external candidates. High School Principal, Diane Davidson, explained, "Another way that they attract candidates is some of the shakers [key Barker County School System leaders] teach

classes for the University of Georgia, and so through those classes, they're able to recruit some out of county folks."

## Principal Socialization – Increasing the Control

Principals experience three types of socialization as they prepare and enter into school leadership, anticipatory socialization, professional socialization, and organizational socialization. Anticipatory socialization occurs when an individual adopts the norms and values of a profession or work organization that they aspire to belong to even though they are not a member of that particular profession or work organization (Merton, 1957). Organizations have no control over the aspirations of individuals; therefore, anticipatory socialization was not in the scope of inquiry for this study.

Professional socialization and organizational socialization were found to be intentionally influenced by the Barker County School System central office leaders (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13

*Control of Socialization*

| Sub-themes | Dominant Codes |
|---|---|
| System control of professional socialization | District involvement in preparation programs<br>Extending formal preparation programs |
| System control of organizational socialization | Being mentored<br>Establishment of cultural norms<br>Superintendent influence |

Professional socialization is accomplished through formal training and preparation programs (Hart, 1993; Normore, 2004). As individuals progress through formal programs of study, they become familiar with the role of being a leader within the education profession. Organizational socialization occurs once an individual has succeeded into a new position and experiences the norms and values of the organization (Normore, 2004; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Themes emerged from the data indicating that the system attempted to control principals' professional and organizational socialization experiences.

*System Control of Professional Socialization*

Professional socialization of school leaders is often left to formal preparation programs that are tied to university degree and certification programs. Relying heavily on the dissemination of theory and research to acquaint aspiring leaders with professional practice, formal preparation programs present a foundation of leadership principles; however, the socialization into the profession frequently falls short of preparing candidates for the principalship (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003).

*District involvement in formal preparation programs.*

There was a significant overlap between the system internally developing leaders and the system controlling the professional socialization of leaders. The Barker County School System recognized the opportunity to get involved with formal preparation programs, and they found value in developing relationships with various higher education institutions' preparation programs. Paul Garmin, Executive Director of Leadership Development, explained:

> As long ago as 25 years, we collaboratively talked about the design of leadership preparation programs. We talked about who should deliver those programs. Should it be the university personnel and school system personnel? Absolutely! We have just entered into a partnership agreement with the University of Georgia on our educational specialist program, and more than likely will have a similar partnership with at least two other universities for the educational specialist degree and hopefully a doctoral level program.

> Again, an illustration of a person who is currently an assistant principal, we are going to work very closely with the university with that individual with the selected mentor so that whatever they do in that advanced graduate program, there is that great marriage between theory and application.

The "marriage between theory and application" serves as the justification for the system to be involved in the control of the professional socialization of aspiring leaders. By having system personnel involved with leader preparation program, the Barker County School System was able to contextualize theory to the desired leadership practices.

*Extending formal preparation programs.*

Aspiring principals experienced an extension to formal preparation programs because they were required to attend the yearlong Quality-Plus Leader Academy. In addition, any individuals hired as a new principal who had not attended the Quality-Plus Leader Academy were required to do so during their first year in the principalship. The curriculum strands of the Quality-Plus Leader Academy included:

- Foundations of Leadership;
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment;
- Human Resources;
- Budgeting and Finance;
- Community and Public Relations;
- Operations Management; and,
- Information Management.

While the curriculum is parallel to most university preparation program offerings, the curriculum of the Quality-Plus Leader Academy was presented by central office personnel, giving candidates an opportunity to learn how theory and research was applied in the system setting.

In addition, the system offered professional development in areas that were related to the Quality-Plus Leader Academy curriculum through "just-time-training" sessions that were scheduled and designed to meet the needs of leaders when they needed it most. Dr. Paul Garmin explained:

> The concept is that you don't deliver the training until the person needs it and is being able to put the learning in practice. For the first-year principals that would include budgeting, and finance, that's not the first thing that you begin to work with when you a first appointed. However, usually in October on November as you are moving through the school year, you do begin to be concerned about the school finance, what the bookkeeper is telling you. So, we provide budgeting and finance, one-on-one assistance, generally in October. Another thing that we provide just-in-time training is on FTE accounting. So, until you are ready to go through that first FTE report accounting, you are not really concerned about the details of that. So, we don't deliver that.

Garmin further explained the rationale for the just-in-time strategy by sharing:

> We don't try to pack a multitude of topics into a 2-day, 3-day, or week-long induction process. In fact, we think we learned for years that having new principals sit through a multi-day induction is pretty ineffective, because we were giving them many things that they had little use for at that time. Since then, again, we try to schedule this when the person needs it. Another illustration of just-in-time is we don't go into a great detail on the ins and outs of hiring, renewal of contract, or non-renewal. Typically, we don't do that until January or February. At that time, when you received your new personnel allotment for a future year, you are beginning to think about some of those personnel issues.

Journey Elementary School Principal, Randi Martin, described the just-in-time training she received, "It might be hiring practices, and it might be, like I said the allotment process, it might be staffing, or documentation. Whatever they feel like is coming up as the most important for us to get." Getting the information when they needed it most was seen as a positive practice and Barrymore High School Principal, Diane Davidson, suggested, "The just-in-time meetings such as FTE counts, how to use your points, interviewing techniques, and those sorts of things have been wonderful." When talking of his own professional development experiences, Crawford Middle School Principal, Bruce Villa, explained:

> It's not a static thing. It's not something I took a class five years ago and now I just make better decisions. The kind of professional development I'm referring to is the continuous ongoing professional development. As things come up, I'm able to get just-in-time training to deal with those things.

By continuing to deliver training in areas that were also covered in formal preparation programs, the Barker County School System extended the learning of new and developing principals. As a result, the professional socialization into the principalship continued through the initial years of being a school principal.

*System Control of Organizational Socialization*

The assumption of organizational socialization theory is that organizations can and do influence the control of the socialization process of individuals who have succeeded into a new role (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Through the interactions between the organization and individuals succeeding into new roles, socialization occurs. In this study, mentoring, the establishment of cultural norms, and the influence of the superintendent were identified as dominant practices that enabled the system to control the organizational socialization of new principals.

*Being mentored.*

Mentoring acted as a form of system control of organizational socialization in the Barker County School System. Mentors were assigned to all new principals, and the mentors stayed with those principals for the first two years of their principalship. Paul Garmin, the Executive Director of Leadership Development, explained:

> We have nine former principals noted for their high level of effectiveness who have retired recently, who were carefully selected for this role, who provide mentoring support to every first and second year principal. . . . I think it's worth knowing that we pay really, really strong attention to those who are early in their career.

Learning how things are done in the system, how to find out needed information, and how to get advice on making decisions or solving problems were all ways mentors supported the organizational socialization of the Barker County School System for first and second year principals. Superintendent William Atkins described the purpose of the formal mentoring program like this:

> The mentors are principals that were respected, were in great schools, know what leadership is, and know how to do those management oversight responsibilities, but also someone that can really help the person develop. You know, not go in a say 'here's how you need to do that,' [but] really work with that principal. Let them know you are their partner.

The formal mentoring program was a critical component in supporting new principals and helping them gain awareness of "how things were done" in the system. The principals interviewed expressed how their mentors had provided valuable support and guidance as they learned the role of being a principal in the Barker County School System. Barrymore High School Principal, Diane Davidson, commented:

> It's nice to know that I have someone I can bounce ideas off of. Someone who will either say: 'yes Diane, I would probably handle it that way or Diane, you know you have thought about this, but have you thought about that?' That makes a huge difference. It just gives you such peace of mind. It's someone who not only has run this school but has been at the county office and can ask, 'have you called this person or have you called that person?' She can direct me to where I need to go.

Knowing how to access information was viewed as critical by new principals. Mentors were repeatedly identified as "sources of information and advice," and Randi Martin, Elementary School Principal, echoed:

> Probably the best support that I have and has absolutely been a life-saving thing that the county has put in place is every new principal has a mentor who is a retired principal from Barker County. [My mentor is] just a very practical, hands-on person that if I need advice, I just pick up the phone: 'OK, what should I do about this? Who do I call about this? How would you handle this?' That has been the most influential and most helpful thing. . . . It boils down to being with somebody that you could share a situation with, you

> would feel confident that it would remain confidential, and it's someone whose judgment that you can really trust.

The mentoring program in the Barker County School System allowed principals to have support without feeling vulnerable to evaluation. Mentors were never consulted by central office personnel to obtain insight about job performance.

*Establishment of cultural norms.*

One of the goals of the Barker School System was to establish an environment where new principals did not have to feel that they were alone in the position. Isolation is a common characteristic of the role of the principal (Jackson, 1977; Mednick, 2003; Walker & Qian, 2006). When talking about how the collaborative efforts needed to be successful, Superintendent Atkins offered:

> I would continue to make sure that the chain of command for the school district didn't act like a chain of command, but instead said 'hey we're in this together and I'm here to help you and your success is my success.'

Central office leaders were expected to perform in "support roles" to principals instead of being someone who principals had to "answer to." When deficiencies were identified in a principal's performance, Atkins explained how the system reacted:

> We do a professional development plan for the principal. Along with that goes the support from the district office, and I also have the area superintendents as well as curriculum people give me their part in that. It's not just principals, it's all of us. So, what are we doing to help each other to make sure that that principal is supported, and he can be successful in what they do?

Executive Director of Leadership Development, Paul Garmin, reflected on how a collaborative culture could help support principals in their daily work. Garmin shared:

> In a Utopian world . . . the interaction would be frequent enough that the principal will never feel isolated or feel alone. I would always feel that even though it's 24/7 and there are very high expectations, there are really a lot of people who can help you. You are not doing this alone, and that we are going to do anything within our power to help you be successful. We went through this process. It's not a guess that you have the knowledge,

> skill, and talent. We have every reason to believe that you are going to be successful. So, our job now is to make sure we do that.

The Barker County School System principals did not feel a sense of isolation or loneliness in their positions. Having access to mentors and central office leaders, the principals generally felt well supported. Bruce Villa, Crawford Middle School Principal, indicated:

> The perspective I have [is] that there are people who care greatly about me and my success in whatever role I'm performing in at the time, whether it's as a teacher, assistant principal, or now as a principal. I guess I would say it's a summary feeling of I'm not alone. I'm not alone. I've read stories and heard about schools where the principal feels desperately alone. It's them against the world and against the faculty . . . I just can't imagine that, and I can't really imagine how you could keep a good person in that type of role without providing at some level a feeling that there are people in this with me, who want me to be successful, and who will provide whatever resources it takes.

Principals were not left to figuring out how to solve problems or how to get information for themselves. In addition, principals reported easy access to information by having open lines of communication with central office leaders. Villa explained:

> When I pick up the phone and call somebody at the county, it is very unusual not to get them on the phone or get a response back relatively quickly. They're available, and as the principal, when I call it's not like anybody else calling and I appreciate that. There is a formal sense that because of the responsibility that I have in our building and because of their role in supporting teachers in education, when I call I'm treated, not like a celebrity, but it's taken very seriously, and I get the assistance that I need.

The support and commitment from central office leaders for new principals allowed the system to control the organizational socialization by helping principals define the role as it existed in the Barker County School System.

The cultural norms of the system nurtured the development of collegial relations that assisted new principals as they learned the role in the context of the Barker County School System. Both central office leaders and principals identified the development of environments that supported open exchanges of information and opportunities to collaboratively problem-solve. An existing practice among principals was a regular informal gathering around breakfast

just to talk and share experiences and ideas. New principals in the county found this to be a great support for their socialization into their new roles. Bruce Villa explained:

> The breakfasts are nice because it's an opportunity to sit and it's not like there's an agenda. The last breakfast I went to I think there were nine principals there. Two of them are looking at retiring in a year. They have been doing this for a long time . . . 20-plus years in the principal seat, and then I was there, I'm pretty new, and there were a couple of other people that were within their first 5 years. So you're just getting this broad spectrum of everything that is going on, and it's funny you know we're not all focused on the same things. For the principal that's been there for 20-25 years, some of the things that they do are the same as me, but they don't think about things the same way. I'm learning. I mean everyday is a new learning experience. Sometimes, just sitting and listening to them talk is instructional. It's worth a graduate course.

Barrymore High School Principal, Diane Davidson, saw the breakfasts as an opportunity to get advice and receive help form her peers. Elaborating further, Davidson, indicated:

> We meet, for instance, Wednesday morning. Our meeting at the county office begins at 8:00, and at 6:30 a group of 10 high school principals meet for breakfast, and we spend a lot of our time talking with each other about how things are going. People will informally ask questions, and we'll help each other that way.

While cited as an informal gathering, principals had been meeting for breakfasts for several years as part of their rituals and routines. During these breakfasts, relationships with peers were built and strengthened, leading to further collaboration and communication as Diane Davidson revealed, "If I have issues I don't have any problems calling any of the principals and saying 'OK, what would you do in this type of situation?' Peer mentoring is certainly a huge part of what we do every day."

First year principals often met together on their own to discuss their experiences and exchange ideas. Journey Elementary School Principal, Randi Martin, described:

> There is a group of new principals that meet once a month. We meet at each others' schools; we just sort of float around to the schools, and have lunch. We share best practices, talk about what's going on, share our experiences, ask advice, and share what we are learning from our own mentors. It's sort of just a brain storm and talk. Sometimes we read articles about self-development, and discuss things that are going on in the county. It's just a very informal, but a helpful time.

The open communication and willingness to share experiences was evident throughout the conversations of the participating principals. Having a collegial culture that supported the organizational socialization was valued and seen as strength in the system as principals became situated into their new roles as school leaders.

*Superintendent influence.*

By focusing on the system and its personnel, the superintendent had meaningful influence on the socialization of new principals. Principals and central office leaders alike expressed the clarity of vision that the superintendent emoted, and they shared that there was a clear vision and message that was consistent and pervasive. Bruce Villa stated, "I think the vision comes from William Atkins. . . . That's what he talks about all the time." Superintendent Atkins played a major role in the socialization of principals and was guided by the mantra, "Everything rises and falls on leadership."

Atkins planned and delivered the first three class session of each academy cohort. In addition, Atkins met with principals on a monthly basis in professional development sessions known as Leadership Development I. Denise Franklin explained:

> Our superintendent leads the professional development when we come in for Leadership Development I. He leads those. He teaches the first two days in the Quality-Plus Leader Academy. I am not saying he'd go in and make the introduction and somebody else comes and teaches. He physically teaches these days, and he creates the curriculum for those days. When he does that, it sets the tone of the culture and the expectations that says we are a continuous quality improving organization.

Principals spoke about the value in having a first-hand experience with the superintendent as they started learning the "Barker County School System way" of leadership. Randi Martin, Elementary School Principal, reflected:

> Once a month we meet as administrators. At that meeting, Mr. Atkins always speaks,

> which actually, that does turn out to be pretty important. Because then, you're hearing from him personally. He has a message every time we meet. We're all hearing the same consistent message from him. Obviously, his message changes, but I think that's an important piece of it. Just hearing from him, his expectations, and where we are going as a county, is important. If we are restructuring – why we are restructuring, rather just putting out a new organizational structure and say, 'here it is.' He will talk us through it and say, 'you know, this is what we are doing, this is why we are doing it, this is the thought behind it.' So, I think that actually is an important piece. One thing that I will say about Barker County is that it's very coherent in terms of the messages that we get.

A clear articulation of a vision and consistent messages from the superintendent helped control the organizational socialization of new principals. Diane Davidson offered, "Mr. Atkins spends a great deal of time talking about broad perspectives and broad initiatives that the county is embarking upon to make sure that we are all on board with and are aware of what's going on." Principals held consistently that there was no doubt as to where the county was headed and what the expectations were as Martin stated, "Even as large as the county is, we [principals] all are pretty clear on where we are going."

### Principal Evaluation – Aligned and Results-Based

Performance assessment that is aligned with organizational goals, differentiates between levels of experience, and is objective provides a meaningful evaluation of personnel that supports the development and succession of personnel (Lawler, 2008; Rothwell, 2005). Traditionally, it has been difficult for the field of education to develop meaningful and impactful evaluation instruments for school leaders (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2007). The Barker County School System developed their evaluation instrument after finding the state evaluation system to be ineffective. Three sub-themes emerged from the data concerning evaluation of principals in the Barker County School System: 1) alignment, 2) results-based, and 3) differentiation (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14

*Evaluation of Principals*

| Sub-Themes | Dominant Codes |
|---|---|
| Alignment | System goals<br>Transparency |
| Results-Based | Student achievement<br>Other evaluation criteria |

The evaluation for principals involved two instruments that were used together to address all aspects of the leader's job performance. The Results-Based Evaluation System (RBES) was designed to take into account all aspects dealing with student achievement, school performance, and school improvement initiatives. The core principles of the RBES were:

- Fairness;
- Continuous improvement;
- Identification of strengths and weaknesses;
- Accountability; and,
- Communication.

The Leadership Evaluation Performance Record (LEPR) was designed to address various leadership dimensions (see Table 4.15). The LEPR was designed initially to fulfill the evaluation requirements of the state, and the LEPR was being revisited at the time of the study. There was a perceived need to align the LEPR that stressed leadership behaviors with the RBES that emphasized results.

*Alignment of Evaluation System*

Performance assessment systems that are aligned with organizational goals and have a clear connection between the performance of the individual and the performance of the organization result in a meaningful and valid measurement of how well an individual is doing their assigned job (Lawler, 2008). The data related to principal evaluation in this study produced two dominant codes (system goals and transparency) from which the theme of alignment emerged.

Table 4.15

*Leadership Evaluation Performance Record (LEPR)*

| Performance Standard | Description |
|---|---|
| Customer Focus | A BCSS leader is focused on our customers, the learners and community, promoting the success of all students by collaborating with family and community members. |
| Data Driven | A BCSS leader collects, disaggregates and uses data to make decisions which promote excellence in student achievement and school performance. |
| Teamwork | A BCSS leader uses teams and teamwork to promote major gains in quality and desired learning results. |
| Passion for Quality | A BCSS leader actively demonstrates a passion for quality. |
| Continuous Improvement | A BCSS leader is committed to leading continuous, comprehensive systemic school improvement. |
| Training for All | A BCSS leader knows the importance of education and training for all. |
| Rewards and Recognition | A BCSS leader understands the significance of rewards and recognition. |

*System goals.*

The Barker County School System's evaluation instruments for all certified personnel were aligned with system goals (see Table 4.16). School board policy cited from the Barker County School System website indicated that the system's core beliefs and commitments were "to maintain and improve a district in which high performing schools educate all children to high standards; eliminate the achievement gap; provide a quality instructional program that includes a rigorous curriculum, effective teaching, and ongoing assessment."

The school board policy relied on student data to measure the achievement of system goals and to measure principal performance. Crawford Middle School Principal, Bruce Villa, explained:

> A new thing that started last year is called the Barker County Theory of Action on Student Achievement that directly correlates to principals, but it's all based on how your kids are doing and that's all part of my evaluation as well.

In addition to being at the core of the principal evaluation system, this same data were used to measure the performance of central office leaders (including the superintendent), school level leaders, and classroom teachers. The Barker County School System school board policy stated on the system website, "The Results-Based Evaluation System (RBES) is used to measure performance in the achievement of system goals and to define accountability at the district, division, school, and classroom levels."

*Transparency.*

The evaluation system, although complex in nature, was seen as transparent by the principals interviewed in the study. Principal Bruce Villa stated:

> The strongest component I guess is that it [evaluation system] is very clear, very well communicated, and very fair in the sense that there are no surprises. I know exactly how I'm going to be evaluated. I understand the process, without having gone through it, I

Table 4.16

*System Goals Aligned with Principal Evaluation System*

| System Goals | Evaluation System Components |
|---|---|
| Goal 1: The Barker County School System will ensure a world-class education for all students focusing on teaching and learning the curriculum. | RBES – Accountability<br>LEPR – Teamwork |
| Goal 2: The Barker County School System will ensure a safe, secure, and orderly environment for all. | RBES – Fairness<br>LEPR – Continuous improvement |
| Goal 3: Barker County School System will optimize student achievement through responsible stewardship of its financial resources necessary to meet current and future demands. | RBES – Fairness<br>LEPR – Continuous improvement |
| Goal 4: The Barker County School System will recruit, employ, develop, and retain a workforce that achieves the mission and goals of the organization. | RBES – Identification of strengths and weaknesses<br>LEPR – Continuous improvement, Training for all |
| Goal 5: The Barker County School System will meet the continuing and changing demand for essential information through technological systems and processes that support effective performance and desired results. | RBES – Identification of strengths and weaknesses<br>LEPR – Continuous improvement |
| Goal 6: The Barker County School System will provide and manage the system's facilities and operations in an exemplary manner as determined by programmatic needs and best management practices. | LEPR – Continuous improvement |
| Goal 7: The Barker County School System will apply continuous quality improvement strategies and principles as the way the organization does business. | RBES – Continuous improvement, Communication<br>LEPR – Teamwork, Passion for quality, Continuous improvement |

> mean, boy, in another place, I don't know that we could even have had this conversation, you know, but in Barker County, it's very clear.

The clarity of the evaluation process was recognized and the importance of student achievement was evident and accepted by the principals. The fact that there was a clear understanding helped principals to be more comfortable with the high accountability for student achievement. Principal Randi Martin commented:

> I am comfortable with it because again, I think that it is very clear from the beginning when you come into Barker County that teaching and learning are the most important things. I think the evaluation system shows that. I mean, there are other things that are important. You do have to make sure the budget is OK, that you're spending money appropriately, and that your operations of your school are running smoothly. But it's all so that teaching and learning can take place. So the fact that 70% of that focus on the evaluation is about student achievement speaks to why we are here. That's what schools are about. So I'm very comfortable with that.

While the emphasis on student achievement was clear, some principals found the mathematical formulas used to calculate student achievement progress confusing. Principal Diane Davidson explained:

> I'm not sure that I understand, I'm not sure anyone understands the entire process at this point or how the RBES has changed, but one of the things that we're graded on is how well our subgroups do as compared to White students in Barker County. So my, Black subgroup and my Hispanic subgroup is compared to how well Barker County's White subgroup does. We received some information yesterday, and I don't quite understand it because I'm not a math person. Evidently, there is a benchmark we need to meet, and there are some anchor points. It depends on where we score in that area as to whether or not we get the full points. I don't quite understand it.

The RBES adjustment of the RBES process was continuous, with new student data each year to use in determining new goals and the changing needs of the schools and system; however, regardless of the fluid nature of the evaluation system, student achievement remained the focus and the top criteria as identified by the participants in the study.

*Results-Based*

The evaluation of principal performance in the Barker County School System was results-based. Primarily, student achievement data were used to determine the success or non-success of principal performance. The extent that student achievement influenced a particular principal's performance was determined by two factors: 1) the years of experience principals had in their current position, and 2) the demographics of the school. Both of these factors played a role in the succession of principals.

*Student achievement.*

Principals who were in their first year as principal of a school were assessed on student achievement; however, only 30% of their total evaluation was based on student performance data. The other 70% of the evaluation was based on the initiatives that principals put in place, the facilitation of the school improvement plan, and surveys of the students, parents, teachers, and staff. Additional information was gathered from the LEPR to determine how well school leaders performed in the dimensions of leadership. As principals proceeded into their second and third years, the percentage of their evaluation that was based on student achievement increased until after their third year, 70% of their evaluation was based on student achievement data (see Table 4.17). In addition to the variance in student achievement weights, the RBES differentiated for schools relative to demographics. More points were awarded as the number of free and reduced lunch students increased.

Principals identified strength in the evaluation system related to the sliding weights that were in place. As sense of fairness was evident as Randi Martin commented:

> I think the strength is that it doesn't place every single thing on student achievement. I know for instance a friend of mine who was moved from one school to another by Mr. Atkins, and part of her first year there, the school didn't make AYP. However, her point to her area superintendent is the more important thing this year is the culture –

> the student culture, the culture of the school, and the community. Being able to put some weight on some other things that are important in the school besides just student achievement I think is important.

Principals succeeding into the principalship felt supported by the evaluation system's sensitivity to their status as a new principal in a new environment. Not being judged solely on student achievement was seen as a fair practice since principals shared that they had little impact on student achievement in their first few years.

Table 4.17

*RBES School Performance Indicator Scores*

| RBES Performance Indicators | | Beginning Principal | Veteran Principal (3 or more years of experience at current school) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Student Achievement | Local Standards | ____ / 15 | _____/ 25 |
| | NCLB Standards | _____/ 15 | _____/ 20 |
| | National/World Class Standards | _____/ 15 | _____/ 25 |
| 2. Initiatives to Improve Student Achievement | | _____/ 25 | _____/ 12 |
| 3. Customer Satisfaction | | _____/ 10 | _____/ 10 |
| 4. School Management | | _____/ 20 | _____/ 8 |
| Total | | ____ / 100 | _____/ 100 |
| Additional Points for Poverty | | _____/ 5 | _____/ 5 |

Note: The total possible score given for each indicator for the beginning principals were fictitious and meant to illustrate the difference in indicators based on experience. Principals in their first and second year had different weights as they moved toward the weights used for veteran principals. The total possible scores given for each indicator for veteran principals were the actual figures used by the Barker County School System.

*Other evaluation criteria.*

While there was an emphasis on student achievement as an evaluation criterion, there was also consideration of perception surveys, school management, and implementation of school

improvement initiatives. The principal evaluation system in the Barker County School System was designed to assess new principals based on the number of years that they were in their current position. Perception surveys, operational outcomes such as budget and facilities management, and the implementation of school improvement initiatives were weighted more heavily than student achievement in the evaluation of new principals.

Perception surveys were used to gauge customer satisfaction among students, parents, and teachers. Paul Garmin explained:

> We do surveys with parents and with staff, and there is a score that is assigned for the results of those surveys. All individual responses across all surveys are averaged for a school and the overall average determines the school's score.

The school's score, just like the school's student achievement as reflected in test scores, are then used as part of the principal evaluation. The Barker County School System principals that participated in this study believed that perceptual surveys were a weak part of their evaluation system. Randi Martin at Journey Elementary School stated:

> I think unfortunately one of the drawbacks to the parent perception survey is that it depends on them getting that back into the county. It's just a little bit unreliable, I think, in terms of how much return you get for sending them out.

The difficulty in combining multiple perceptions and coming up with a single measure was presented by Crawford Middle School Principal, Bruce Villa, "Well, the surveys are going to be a weaker element because you're getting individual perceptions put together and, and trying to come to some conclusions about those." Barrymore High School Principal, Diane Davidson, felt that student surveys were "weak" because "kids typically don't rate very well." Customer satisfaction, measured by perception surveys, was given the least amount of emphasis of all the criteria involved in the principal evaluation process, and typically was weighted the same for new principals and experienced principals (see Table 4.12).

School management, while not seen as important as student achievement for veteran principals, was given considerably more weight for principals who were in their first three years of being a school leader (see Table 4.12). Superintendent William Atkins described what the system considered a well managed school when he shared:

> The students are well managed, the [financial] books have been balanced, and the campus [is] orderly. Now we don't want the principal to cut the grass, but if I were to see a school that had grass looking terrible, I'd ask principal had they been reminded that this is to be done. Somebody has got to be sounding the alarm. But I think the biggest measure of whether the principal is effective is how well students are achieving based on the data.

Although seen as important, principals were scored on the management of the school by exception as Paul Garmin explained:

> We assume that you are going to earn the maximum score. It's only when we have an exception to what we expect a school principal to do that we begin to adjust that score. What does that tell me? It tells me there are expectations for how my school building looks, but am I going to get a lot more [points] by making my floor even shinier? No!

The principals participating in this study ranked school management second to student achievement in order of importance in the criteria for their evaluations. School management was seen by principals as something that they had control over and as Journey Elementary School Principal, Randi Martin, relateded:

> School operations for new principals and principals just coming into the building is another fairly large piece [of the evaluation process]. Because, again, that's something you can quickly change and you do have direct control over almost immediately. So that is given a pretty heavy weight to begin with.

Even with having control of the management aspects of the job, principals felt a sense of accountability and importance in meeting the standards for management. Crawford Middle School Principal, Bruce Villa offered, after ranking student achievement as the top criterion for principal evaluation. Villa elaborated further:

> I would place managerial competence, scheduling and budgeting next. Specifically, there is a component on my evaluation that has totally to do with the management aspect of

> being a building leader which includes human resources issues and the financial concerns. There is strict accountability. I'm entrusted with a public school. I'm accountable to tax payers. I need to be wise in how I use money and what we do to achieve our goals. I put it right after student achievement, primarily because if I make serious mistakes, let's say I spend $14,000 more this year than I'm supposed to, that's going to get some attention. I'm going to have a conversation with several people.

The expectation of sound school management was evident for new principals. As principals gained years of experience in one setting, the weight given to the managerial aspects of the job diminished greatly. The shift in weight from managerial responsibilities to instructional responsibilities as principals gained experience could be tied to the understanding that the "hard skills" required to maintain adequate operations of facilities, sound financial management, and personnel oversight, were set once developed.

The learning of management practices and techniques was considered to be complete once principals had shown success in the operational aspects of school leadership. The planning for improved student performance was considered an important skill to be measured for beginning principals as this was viewed as something that they could control. The development of the "soft skills" of personal interaction with teachers, students, and parents on the other hand, was ongoing, and was considered critical for the instructional leader. As principals gained experience, the expectation was they would further develop those skills that had more impact on teaching and learning.

Implementation of initiatives to improve student achievement was seen as the most important criterion on which a first-year principal was evaluated and was given the most weight of the criteria outside of student achievement. Student achievement initiatives were the part of the Local School Plan for Improvement (LSPI), Diane Davidson (Barrymore High School) explained when describing the RBES, "Then the next section is initiatives to improve student achievement. That's your LSPI including technology initiatives, professional learning, and that

sort of thing." Professional development of the staff was an important aspect in the evaluation of new principals as they implemented student achievement initiatives that target school and system goals.

When talking about his upcoming evaluation meeting with his area superintendent, as a first year principal at Crawford Middle School, Bruce Villa, offered:

> I'm very aware that at this first junction, it is primarily on what I've put in place for this year going forward. I mean current things I've been doing in the last few months. This is our 11th week of school. So the past 11 weeks, the things that I've done, that's what they're mainly looking at now, ensuring that I'm doing the things that an effective principal needs to be doing as far as professional development, communication with parents, motivating students, and that kind of thing. As time goes on and after three years, it's going to be much more of how did your kids do based on last year's plan and its implementation and the results.

The Barker County School System placed emphasis on customer satisfaction, school management, and program implementation in the evaluation of principals early in their experience. The shift over the next two years to student achievement as the main criteria, indicated that the Barker County School System was willing to assess new principals on things that they had more direct control over, moving then to criteria (student achievement) where there was less direct control as they gained experience. Journey Elementary School Principal, Randi Martin, explained:

> As a brand new principal moving into their first year at a school that may have been under the leadership of another principal, your evaluation looks a little bit different in that you're given essentially three years. You're still obviously evaluated, but you're evaluated differently. The student achievement becomes less significant as you move into a school just because it takes time for you to establish the direction for the school. So a bigger piece of a beginning principal or a principal that moves into a new school, the evaluation is more heavily weighted toward student achievement initiatives, teacher and staff perception, or community perception surveys. As those three years pass, more of it becomes weighted toward the achievement and less of it comes from those other pieces as well because the county's trying to give you an opportunity to put into place things that you want to put into place that will impact student achievement and have it reflect what you've done verses what has been done by the previous person.

The evaluation system for principals in the Barker County School System was seen as fair, and principals had a clear understanding of what they were being evaluated on in their initial year as principal and in the years to come.

The Barker County School System's evaluation system for principals was results-based and aligned with system goals. In addition, the principals had a clear picture of how they were being evaluated, indicating that the system was transparent. The principals found the evaluation instrument to be fair, and they believed that, while there was considerable accountability for student learning attached to their evaluation, overall, the evaluation systems' focus on student achievement constituted a legitimate criterion for the measurement of school leader performance.

## Professional Development – A Means of Support

Effective professional development for school leadership is strategic in nature (Normore, 2007) and job-embedded (Houle, 2006). Themes emerging from the professional development interview protocol indicated that professional development for principals in the Barker County School System was strategic and non-traditional (see Table 4.18).

Table 4.18

*Professional Development*

| Sub-Themes | Dominant Codes |
|---|---|
| Strategic nature | Aligned professional development initiatives<br>Just-in-time training |
| Non-traditional experiences | Multiple source<br>Contextual |

The strategic nature of professional development for school leaders in the Barker County School System was evident through the alignment of professional development initiatives with school

and system goals and the timing of delivery of information so principals received the information when they needed it most. In addition, professional development for principals was viewed as coming from multiple sources in both traditional and non-traditional settings.

The sub-themes that emerged in the area of professional development for principals in the Barker County Schools System overlapped with sub-themes that existed in other findings in the area of socialization. The system used professional development of principals as a practice to control and facilitate the socialization of individuals as they moved into their new roles as school leaders.

*Strategic Nature*

Professional development in the Barker County School System was defined as being any activity that promoted the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for principals to achieve the goals of their school and the system. Superintendent Atkins explained:

> I define professional development as any formal learning that is developed for a principal, formal in terms of a seminar. [Professional development is] a specific training whether that would be something like budgeting and finance, instructional leadership, professional learning community, or anything along those lines. I would also add to that definition that professional development also includes the ongoing support, and that is much less structured than what I just described.

Principals echoed the definition of the superintendent, citing formal meetings, informal meetings, and the opportunity to exchange ideas with their mentors.

*Aligned professional development initiatives.*

Professional development for principals was heavily controlled by the central office. Information coming into the system from external sources was filtered and configured to meet the needs of the system. When talking about going to professional conferences, Principal Bruce Villa stated:

Barker filters everything. I mean we get stuff all the time, but it comes through our

> central office. I am not going to sit here and tell you that I can't believe everything that Barker sends. I don't think they are out there trying to keep good information from us, but you do hear different stories when you go to those conferences and that's a huge plus for it [going to conferences].

Principal Diane Davidson added, "We get it [information] after Barker puts their spin on it. . . . We get it after they have taken it, deciphered it, figured out what is the best thing, and then we get most of it." The control of information was a strategic move by the system leaders and allowed only that information that was seen as important to the mission and vision of the system to be disseminated.

To further the control of professional development for principals, most learning opportunities were presented by central office leaders. The Quality-Plus Leader Academy was delivered by central office leaders with the superintendent taking the lead. Denise Franklin, Chief Human Resource Officer, explained, "Our superintendent leads the professional development days, those staff development days when we come in for leadership development, he leads those."

There was an effort to stay away from getting into the habit of pursuing professional development that was available, but not connected to the needs of the system. When addressing professional development initiatives for school leaders, the Executive Director of Leadership Development, Paul Garmin, explained:

> [There is a] pretty strong belief in avoiding book of the month, flavor of the week; [a] pretty strong belief that we can and should learn from others, but there is no single recipe, no single answer, and some of the programs that we read about, hear about, learn about and that a pretty strong belief that we can adapt but we rarely, if ever, adopt.

This sentiment was echoed by Crawford Middle School Principal, Bruce Villa, when talking about professional development activities:

> I think they really try to even avoid those kinds of things [flavor of the month]. I think they want to stick with the things that we know are going to improve student achievement and continue to just come up with different angles on those same types of things.

Professional development for principals in the Barker County School System had a "laser-like focus" on student achievement, which represented an alignment to the system vision, mission, and goals.

*Just-in-time training.*

One component of the monthly meetings was just-in-time training which was strategically scheduled to maximize the effect by delivering critical information at the time of year when it was needed most. The Barker County School System believed that professional development on certain school management skills and practices delivered all at once was "pretty ineffective." By strategically scheduling critical topics throughout the year, the just-in-time training ensured that principals, particularly new principals, were receiving information when they needed it most and was part of the ongoing professional development in the Barker County School System.

*Non-traditional experiences.*

Professional development for principals was ongoing in the Barker County School System. The traditional monthly meetings served as a regular and ongoing opportunity for central office leaders and principals to meet and discuss issues that were occurring in the schools and system. In addition to the monthly formal meetings, there were meetings held by principals within school clusters. These meetings gave principals an opportunity to discuss issues that were in the communities and the schools that served the same children. The practice of vertical teaming was encouraged and allowed for principals to work together to create a cohesive and

coherent learning environment from elementary through high school levels. High School Principal, Diane Davidson, explained:

> We have a very close-knit and tight cluster group of principals. I, probably once a week or so, am in contact with one of those principals in regard to something in our community or asking them how they would handle something. We work very closely with the two middle schools. Barrymore Elementary, who's just down the road here, the principal is wonderful. She's been in the cluster longer than anyone else, so I can pick up the phone and call her about anything. We meet once a month as cluster principals, and we do a lot of vertical teaming. We're all very much on the same page. We try to give everybody a heads up if something's going to affect the other one.

Area superintendents were often involved with the cluster meetings, and they assisted in finding resources and information that were unique to a particular cluster's need. The cluster meetings were a non-traditional delivery of professional development that helped in contextualizing the learning of school leaders to their specific school community.

Mentoring was seen by principals as an effective form of job-embedded and individualized professional development. Bruce Villa explained:

> I can tie her [mentor] into professional development because she is a retired, highly experienced professional, and I greatly respect and listen carefully to what she talks with me about. So there is a huge sense that she's providing one-on-one professional development in specific areas of need. That is the best professional development I have experienced, period.

Mentoring was seen as a support for learning, and being able to get information that was timely and highly contextual was valued by the new Barker County School System principals.

## Case Summary

The Barker County School System faced challenges as a large urban community that continued to grow rapidly. System leaders had a high sense of urgency for planned succession of school principals as the need for new administrators was pronounced with the opening of 10 new schools and numerous anticipated retirements. The system took a proactive stance in addressing future leadership needs by:

- developing a pipeline for next generation leaders;
- controlling the socialization of new leaders;
- creating an evaluation system that was conducive to supporting succeeding leaders; and,
- providing professional development that was strategic and contextual.

While principals in the Barker County School System cited challenges in their work, they reported a sense of being supported by central office leaders, peers, and mentors as they transitioned into the principalship. Succeeding principals experienced pressure to meet high standards, but at the same time, they received substantial amounts of support. Evaluation instruments and professional development initiatives that were defined, aligned with system goals, and individualized to specific contexts were seen as a support to principals.

In general, the Barker County School System's culture shared the responsibility for student success. The success or failure of a particular school was seen as the success or failure of the system. Central office leaders saw their main responsibility as supporting principals, and in turn, principals saw their responsibility as supporting teachers. The shared responsibility for student success, support for ongoing development, and high levels of collaboration were evident as individuals succeeded into the principalship.

The ongoing practices of the system leaders regarding the succession of principals was similar to the processes proposed in the literature on succession planning found in the literature external to the field of education. In Chapter 5, the findings presented in this chapter are more closely examined in relation to the existing literature addressing succession planning. Characteristics of effective succession planning and management from the private and public sectors is discussed.

# CHAPTER 5

# DISCUSSION

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how one Georgia school system experienced the succession of principals. Principal leadership has been identified as having compelling influence on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008); furthermore, the changing of school leaders has an effect on the performance of schools (Fink & Brayman, 2004, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hargreaves, Moore, Fink, Brayman, & White, 2003). Therefore, a study of how a successful school system addresses the succession of school leaders can be valuable in identifying practices that enhance the succession of principals and promote positive effects on schools when leadership changes.

To further define the study, the Barker County School System was chosen as the case to be studied because as a large urban system with 105 schools, the system had achieved success in raising student achievement as measured by the Georgia Adequate Yearly Progress mandate, while at the same time, supporting an active school leader succession environment. The goals of the study were to identify the nature, characteristics, and practices of the succession of principals in the Barker County School System through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants. This chapter discusses how the practices of the Barker County School System align with the characteristics of effective succession planning found in the literature.

To gain a better understanding about the succession of school leaders in the Barker County School System, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do school systems control the socialization and development of their school leaders?
2. How do school systems plan for the succession of school leaders?
3. Which practices related to succession are experienced in successful school systems?

The research questions were developed in an effort to gain a better understanding of the succession of principals in a large urban public school system.

For the purposes of this study, being "successful" was defined as the school system's ability to consistently increase the number of schools meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements for the state of Georgia as related to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability mandates. The Barker County School System had shown a consistent increase in the number of schools meeting AYP expectations from 85.9% of 92 schools meeting AYP in 2004 to 99.1% of 105 schools meeting AYP in 2009 (see Table 4.4). In addition, the Barker County School System experienced growth leading to increased diversity presenting a growing challenge in closing the achievement gap among subgroups of students (see Table 4.8). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the Barker County School System was considered a "successful" school system

There is a paucity of literature addressing leader succession in public schools; however, there is literature on leadership succession from the private sector in the areas of business and industry and the public sector in the areas of medicine and governmental agencies. Drawing from the existing literature outside the field of education, a comparison of the practices found in the Barker County School System case study with the established practices on succession in other fields will assist in understanding the succession process of school leaders in this system.

To explore how well the Barker County School System's practices related to the succession of school leaders in the areas of socialization, professional development, evaluation, and recruitment and selection; a comparison to the known effective characteristics of succession planning in professional and business fields outside of education is discussed. The promotion into school leadership may or may not be similar to the succession of leaders in other professions and industry; however, by comparing human resource and strategic planning practices in education with other professions, there can be an increased understanding of how succession occurs and how it may be planned so schools and school systems benefit.

In this discussion of the study, succession planning is introduced as well as characteristics of effective succession planning from private and public sectors; moreover, the relationships between the practices revealed in the study of the Barker County School System are made with the appropriate existing characteristics of succession as reported in the literature. Next, the control of socialization as a component to effective succession planning is discussed. Finally, a concluding general discussion of the findings of the comparison between the succession practices in the Barker County School System and the effective practices from the literature is presented.

## Succession Planning

Succession planning is the systematic approach to the succession of personnel. Thought out in a strategic fashion, succession planning coordinates human resources and practices to ensure the organizational needs are met when personnel changes (Rothwell, 2005; Steele, 2006). Rothwell asserted that, "An SP&M [succession planning and management] program is thus a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement" (p. 10). While immediate personnel needs are met through succession

planning, the attention to future personnel needs is also a focus of effective succession planning. Rothwell explained, "One aim of SP&M is to match the organization's available (present) talent to its needed (future) talent" (Rothwell, 2005, p. 13). Succession planning ensures the maintenance and sustainment of the leadership core in an organization by planning for the replacement of leaders through the establishment of a leadership pipeline and the implementation of a continuous development environment to meet the present and future needs of the organization.

Attention to succession planning originated in private sector organizations over the prevalent concerns in business and industry that experienced a sudden, unexpected loss of an executive due to unforeseen circumstances (Friedman, 1987a; Rothwell, 2005). In describing the challenges of succession, Friedman offered:

> In the world of management practice the succession problem is omnipresent, even if implicitly. In all organizations the challenges and opportunities inherent in the need to replace current executives is continuous, for leaders are mortal. The question is how to manage the succession process in a way that yields optimal outcomes for both the individuals involved and the organizations in which they work. (1987a, p. vii)

Originally, succession was seen as a concern mainly at the top executive levels of an organization; however, succession planning has evolved to address the succession of individuals into any key position within the organization (Rothwell, 2005; Steele, 2006). In private organizations, the executive level, upper management, and middle management positions are seen as areas that require attention to succession concerns. In public schools, these levels are translated to superintendent, central office leaders, building principals, and assistant principals.

Changes in principals often have a dramatic effect on the school (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Leadership succession at the level of principal in school systems is critical due to the probable impact of principal leadership on student learning and teacher performance (Hallinger

& Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008); however, there has been little attention given to the planning of the succession of principals. In spite of the importance of leadership at the principal level, there has been sparse attention given to the succession of school leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Is this lack of attention a result of differences in organizational functions between the private and public sectors?

Interest in the differences between public and private organizations has been present in the research on organizational theory (Bozeman & Bretschneider, 1994; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000) and management practices (Boyne, 2002; Ring & Perry, 1985). The extent to which the "publicness" of an organization affects performance has served as a source of contention among those who study organizations (Bozeman & Bretschneider, 1994). In general, the perceptions of many organizational theorists suggest that public organizations do not perform as well as private organizations (Rainey & Bozeman, 2000).

There is a recognized lack of literature addressing the leadership succession in the public sector (Boyne & Dahya, 2002; Hill, 2005; Schall, 1997). Public organizations do not perform as well as private organizations in the area of leadership succession and management (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; National Academy of Public Administration, 1997). In a survey study of 54 federal agencies and public sector organizations, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) revealed that public sector organizations shared the same concerns as private sector organizations in relation to having sufficient leaders to meet emerging changes in their organizations" (p. xv). However, there was little attempt to manage or to plan for leader succession in the organizations that participated in the NAPA study, and the findings of the NAPA study reflected:

> Only 28 percent of governmental respondents in the CHRM [Center for Human Resource Management] survey had, or planned to have, a succession management program. Forty-four percent had a leadership development program. Eleven percent link succession/leader development efforts to the agency's strategic plan, and – in a time of shrinking resources – only 15 percent protect such efforts as a budget priority. (NAPA, 1997, p. xvi)

The findings of the NAPA survey revealed that one reason the approaches to succession are different in public sector organizations than they are in private sector organizations is barriers that exist that are unique to public organizations. Organizational culture, low priority given by organizational leaders, insufficient resources, inadequate rewards, limited mobility, and lack of role models were cited as barriers to planning and managing the succession of school leaders (NAPA). In addition, public sector organizations often feel that they have to compete with private organizations "for people with leadership potential and thus [have] to approach succession planning quite differently and less effectively" (p. 61). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) suggested there were differences in approaches to succession planning between private and public sector organizations (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

*Differences in Approaches to Succession Between the Public and Private Sectors*

| Public Sector | Private Sector |
|---|---|
| Passively lets candidates emerge, and tends to depend on self-selection | Identifies future leaders early and actively recruits for future positions |
| Has a short term vision of human resource management | Has a long term vision of human resource management |
| Manages succession informally in an "as needed basis" | Manages succession formally, with a systematic approach |
| Concentrates on replacing current role competencies to meet current needs | Defines future competencies needed and emphasizes continuing professional education to address changing needs |

| *Table 5.1 (continued). Differences in Approaches to Succession Between the Public and Private Sectors* | |
|---|---|
| Public Sector | Private Sector |
| Perceives the management and planning of succession as an additional cost to the organization | Perceives the management and planning of succession as an asset to the organization |

## Characteristics of Effective Succession Planning

Although the approaches to succession planning in public sector organizations appear to be different from the practices found in the private sector, the characteristics of effective succession planning and management for private sector organizations have been found to be similar to those characteristics in private sector organizations. Studies done in both private and public arenas have revealed a common understanding of what effective succession planning "looks like" in successful organizations (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2

*Characteristics of Effective Succession Planning in Private and Public Sectors*

| Characteristic | Private Sector | Public Sector |
|---|---|---|
| <u>Top Leadership Involvement:</u><br><br>There is top management participation and support with an obligation to identify and prepare successors. | Friedman, 1987b; Leibman, Brewer, & Maki, 1996; Rothwell, 2005 | Collins & Collins, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), 1997 |
| <u>Responsibility:</u><br><br>There is a dedicated responsibility through the identification of who is accountable for succession planning. | Fulmer & Conger, 2004; Ready & Conger, 2007; Rothwell, 2005 | NAPA, 1997; Pynes, 2004 |

*Table 5.2 (continued). Characteristics of Effective Succession Planning in Private and Public Sectors*

| Characteristic | Private Sector | Public Sector |
|---|---|---|
| Identification of Competencies:<br><br>Succession planning emphasizes qualities necessary to surpass movement to the next higher-level job. There is a comparison of present performance and future potential. | Fulmer & Conger, 2004; Friedman, 1987b; Hall, 1986; Rothwell, 2005 | Collins & Collins, 2007; NAPA, 1997; Pynes, 2004; Schall, 1997 |
| Emphasis on Development:<br><br>Specific developmental programs are established and conducted. Developmental programs establish familiarity with who, when, where, why, and how. | Friedman, 1987b; Fulmer & Conger, 2004; Hall, 1986; Leibman, Brewer, & Maki, 1996; Rothwell, 2005 | Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; NAPA, 1997 |
| Mentoring:<br><br>Formal mentoring is emphasized in effective succession planning. | Fulmer & Conger, 2004; Leibman, Brewer, & Maki, 1996; Rothwell, 2005 | Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Tucker & Codding, 2002 |
| Strategic in Nature:<br><br>Succession planning is strategic. Succession planning is needs-driven and compares best practices with other organizations. There is a focused attention and systematic approach to succession planning that extends to all levels of the organization and aligns various practices and functions to the overall goals of the system. | Friedman, 1987b; Hall, 1986; Leonard, 2005; Ready & Conger, 2007; Rothwell, 2005 | NAPA, 1997; Pynes, 2004; Schall, 2997 |

## Succession Planning in the Barker County School System

The analysis of the data revealed how the Barker County School System approached the succession of school leaders. Using the findings discussed in Chapter 4, an in-depth look at how the practices of the Barker County School System related to what the literature has established as characteristics of effective succession planning helped to situate the data from the case in the

literature on succession. In the following sections, each of the characteristics of effective succession planning presented in Table 5.2 are discussed in the context of the Barker County School System.

*Top Leadership Involvement*

Effective succession planning is led by top organizational leaders who have deep commitment to the development of leaders and the creation of a pipeline that builds "bench strength" in the workforce. Having a vision that includes leadership succession is an essential ingredient for organizational success in the future as the intellectual capital of the organization is protected and nurtured. Top executives of organizations first need to realize the sense of urgency for succession planning and then commit to their own involvement in the process.

The Barker County School System's top executive, Superintendent William Atkins, was committed and involved in succession planning. Using the mantra that "everything rises and falls on leadership," Atkins delivered a clear message that leadership was important and that the planning for future leadership needs was highly valued. His commitment to succession planning was evident in his vision for leadership and his direct involvement in the leadership development programs that the system offered.

All participants in the study reflected on the superintendent's vision for the school system. Embedded in that vision, succession planning was an important practice that was clear to the participants in the study—principals and central office leaders in the system. From the first day of his appointment to the superintendency 13 years before the time of the study, Atkins expressed a need to address the concern to prepare future leaders. Given the size of the Barker County School System with 105 schools at the time of the study and with a projected number of principal openings the following year of approximately 23 to 24 (see Table 4.10), there was a

clear sense of urgency and value placed on having a plan to ensure that school performance would not be negatively affected by changes (e.g., retirements, promotions, new school openings, etc.) in leadership in the schools.

Atkins' vision for the development of a leadership pipeline led to the creation of the position of Executive Director of Leadership Development, and he recruited Paul Garmin, who had extensive human resource experience to assume the position. In addition to Garmin, three Directors of Leadership Development were appointed, and an administrative assistant dedicated to the Leadership Development Program was assigned. The purpose of the Leadership Development Program was to create and to facilitate a program focused on the development of future school leaders in the Barker County School System. The staff of the program became known as the Quality-Plus Leader Academy Team. The dedication of additional human resources was evidence of the commitment and support provided by Superintendent Atkins.

In addition, Atkins was personally involved in the process of developing a pipeline of leaders. All participants commented about the physical presence of the superintendent during the Quality-Plus Leader Academy and the monthly leadership meetings held for assistant principals and principals. Atkins planned and delivered the first two classes presented to each Quality-Plus Leader Academy cohort, and he was present at all the following class meetings. Study participants commented on how the superintendent's involvement "made us realize how important it [succession and development of leaders] was to Mr. Atkins and the county."

*Responsibility*

The top executive in any organization cannot shoulder the entire responsibility of managing a succession plan. While there needs to be involvement and commitment from the top

leader in the organization, the responsibility of executing a succession plan must be shared with managers or leaders diffused across different levels of the organization.

In a public school system, there are two distinct levels within the organizational hierarchy: 1) the central office level and 2) the school level. The two levels help to establish a larger organization (the system) that encompasses all schools within the system, and smaller organizations (schools) which may or may not function as part of the larger system. A primary difference in the two levels of organization in school systems is that most central office employees who hold a professional certificate are considered to be educational leaders, while at the school levels often the only employees considered "leaders" are principals and assistant principals. While the superintendent is the top executive of the school system, the principal is the top executive of the individual school. In this sense, the school systems can be viewed as being comprised of a number of smaller organizations (schools) within a single larger organization (system).

The implications that the typical hierarchical structure of school systems poses on succession planning is there are really two levels of "executive officers" in the organization: 1) the superintendent, and 2) the principal. Although there is a need for central leadership involvement and support for succession planning, the responsibility of being involved and committed should be shared with the principals of the individual schools as they represent the executive officer of the smaller school organization. The shared responsibility at these two primary levels of hierarchy was explored in the Barker County School System.

In planning for the succession of principals at the central office level, the Barker County School System involved the Superintendent, the Chief Academic Officer, the Executive Director of Human Resources, and the Executive Director of Leadership Development in what was

identified as a "joint effort with what we are calling the Leadership Development Council." The number of potential job openings was constantly monitored by the Leadership Development Council. In addition, the office of the Chief Academic Officer assisted in keeping track of the leadership needs of individual schools.

The Chief Academic Officer was responsible for leading the Division of Teaching and Learning, and worked with Area Superintendents to monitor and to assess school performance. To accommodate the large size of the Barker County School System, there were three Area Superintendents that were each assigned a particular geographic area to oversee within Barker County. Each area was comprised of five or six "clusters" each of which contained three to five elementary schools, one to two middle schools, and one high school. Each Area Superintendent was responsible for the evaluation and supervision of 35 to 40 principals. In addition to schools making up the clusters, two of the area superintendents were responsible for various special programs (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.3

*Area Superintendent Cluster Assignments 2009-2010*

| Area | Number of Clusters | Number of Schools | Special Programs |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | 6 | 39 | 4 |
| II | 5 | 35 | 6 |
| III | 6 | 40 | 0 |
| Total | 17 | 109 | 10 |

Area Superintendents had the responsibility of being a liaison between the school organization and the system organization, which assisted in succession planning efforts of the Barker County

School System. The Area Superintendents reported directly to the Chief Academic Officer, who, in turn, reported directly to the Superintendent.

The communication between Area Superintendents, the Chief Academic Officer, and the Superintendent assisted in developing an awareness of the leadership needs of particular schools. School principals were in constant contact with their Area Superintendent and worked closely with them on their school improvement efforts and their own performance assessments. Through formal evaluation data as well as informal observations and interactions, the Area Superintendents were able to communicate the "state of the schools" from a leadership perspective to the Chief Academic Officer.

Other Barker County School System central office leaders took responsibility in supporting the succession of principals as well. In addition to the Area Superintendents, the various divisions that provided services to schools (i.e., facility management, business and finance, and legal issues), carried the responsibility of supporting principals in general, but in particular, newly appointed principals and potential principals who were being prepared through the Quality-Plus Leader Academy. Participants in the study commented that one of the strengths of Quality-Plus Leader Academy was the involvement of the directors of various divisions in the delivery of information at the training sessions. The assistance of central office leaders in the professional and organizational socialization of future leaders was a responsibility that was planned as part of the succession process in the Barker County School System. When reflecting on the involvement of central office leaders in the delivery of Quality-Plus Leader Academy curriculum, Randi Martin, Journey Elementary Principal, stated, "For those people [central office personnel] that you may not have had that relationship with prior to the academy, you certainly developed it."

While there was a sense of shared responsibility among central office leaders in the Barker County School System, there was not a sense of shared responsibility between principals and central office. Principals participating in the study all felt that developing their assistant principals was part of their responsibility; however, there was not an established connection between the development of leadership and planning for succession within their schools. Central office personnel felt that principals needed to be "more aggressive" in developing leaders to take their place if they left the principalship. The principals who participated in this study were all in their first two years of service as a principal; therefore, the sense of urgency to have assistant principals to succeed into their position may not be as prevalent as with principals who may be near retirement or seeking a move into a central office position.

*Identification of Competencies*

Effective succession planning emphasizes qualities necessary to surpass movement to the next higher-level job. To determine the needed qualities, the identification of specific competencies needed to perform the job successfully is an essential component when planning for the succession of leaders. Competencies are the defined characteristics that are necessary to successfully complete a job. Boyatzis (1982) defined competency as "an underlying characteristic of an employee (i.e., motive, trait, skill, aspects of one's self image, social role, or a body of knowledge) that results in effective and/or superior performance in a job" (p. 82).

The identification of valued competencies in an organization leads to a competency model which can help "clarify differences between outstanding (exemplary) and average performers" (Rothwell, 2005, p. 83). Competency models help define not only work-based behaviors and skills, but also include attitudes and motivation that are personal characteristic

traits of the individual. In addition, competency models "establish clear work expectations for the present and the future" (Rothwell, p. 83).

The Barker County School System identified competencies necessary for effective principal performance by using established competency models and adapting them to meet the needs of the school system. Leadership competencies defined by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and the Gallup Organization were used to create the required competencies for school leaders that defined a Quality-Plus Leader in the Barker County School System. The competencies were then categorized into performance standards for principals. The performance standards were used as part of the principal evaluation process as identified in the Leadership Evaluation Performance Record (see Table 4.14). Each performance standards was defined by various competencies that were identified as being valued by the Barker County School System (see Table 5.4).

Table 5.4

*Leadership Performance Standards and Corresponding Competencies*

| | Standard | Competencies: A BCSS Principal… |
|---|---|---|
| I: | Customer Focus | • Promotes the involvement of the community in the educational programs of the school;<br>• Promotes the involvement of the school in the life of the community;<br>• Promotes the involvement of families in the educational programs of the school;<br>• Promotes collaboration and communication among members of the school and school community;<br>• Demonstrates value for diversity; and,<br>• Promotes open and ongoing communication with community types concerning trends, issues, and potential changes. |

*Table 5.4 (continued). Leadership Performance Standards and Corresponding Competencies*

*Leadership Performance Standards and Corresponding Competencies*

| Standard | | Competencies: A BCSS Principal… |
|---|---|---|
| II: | Data Driven | • Demonstrates the ability to collect and manage data for critical domains of information (e.g., student performance data, demographic data of the school's students and community, and stakeholder perspectives in the quality of work of the school);<br>• Works with staff to analyze data from a systems perspective to gain an understanding of the school's strengths, limitations, and emerging issues of importance to the school;<br>• Communicates summaries of pertinent information to the school's stakeholders;<br>• Uses the analysis of data to guide the school improvement process; and,<br>• Uses data to make staffing decisions. |
| III: | Teamwork | • Uses fundamental principles of interpersonal communication, consensus building, conflict resolution, and organizational change in working with teams;<br>• Involves teachers, administrators, support staff, and, if possible, parent and/or community representative and students to assist in developing and implementing the school's plan for improvement; and,<br>• Educates team members about quality improvement tools. |
| IV: | Passion for Quality | • Exhibits quality leadership in an active, obvious, and informed manner;<br>• Models the leadership principle "Know yourself, know your people, and know your job;"<br>• Knows what he/she is committed to and what he/she must do;<br>• Involves every staff member in improving quality;<br>• Develops a personal code of ethics guided by the Code of Ethics for Educators established by the state;<br>• Demonstrates ethical decision making; and,<br>• Models professionalism through appearance, attitude, integrity, dependability, and initiative. |
| V: | Continuous Improvement | • Leads the school in maintaining a constant and steady focus in making a difference in improving student learning through the continuous improvement of instructional practices and organizational conditions;<br>• Models and encourages others to sustain the commitment to "stay the course" in achieving school goals for improvement, despite problems or obstacles; |

*Table 5.4 (continued). Leadership Performance Standards and Corresponding Competencies*
*Leadership Performance Standards and Corresponding Competencies*

| Standard | | Competencies: A BCSS Principal… |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Demonstrates active and continuous problem monitoring;<br>• Uses resources to enhance school and system goals;<br>• Uses technology to manage school operations;<br>• Establishes a physical environment conducive to learning; and,<br>• Supervises and evaluates staff in an appropriate manner. |
| VI: | Training for All | • Develops a structure to provide professional ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to facilitate school improvement initiatives that are substantial, sustained, relevant, and varied;<br>• Uses research about best professional practices;<br>• Seeks external assistance as necessary for training and development of staff; and,<br>• Provides mentoring staff as needed. |
| VII: | Rewards and Recognition | • Reviews and analyzes significant turning points or achievements of the school, and formally recognizes and celebrates these accomplishments; and,<br>• Provides the time for reflection by the school's stakeholders about the school's improvement process and collects and reviews their insights to help adjust or refine the improvement process. |

The Barker County School System used the competencies presented in Table 5.4 to establish job descriptions, professional development plans, and evaluation criteria that aligned to the recruitment and selection, talent development, and performance assessment practices of school leaders.

*Emphasis on Development*

Organizations with effective succession plans conduct developmental programs that are specific to the role of the position being filled. Developmental plans assist aspiring and new leaders in closing the gap between what they know and can do currently and what they need to know and do in the future. Leadership skills (professional development) and knowledge of how the organization works (cultural development) are both addressed in effective development

plans. An effective plan designed for the succession of principals would promote developmental programs that specifically focus on the principalship in the context of the school system.

Cultural developmental programs establish familiarity with who, when, where, why, and how and contributed to the organizational socialization of aspiring and new principals. Knowledge of individuals in the organization who can provide critical information to support the work of succeeding leaders and how to contact the holders of information is an important part of the development of new leaders. In addition, knowing when specific information is needed and why it is needed is critical if new leaders are to function effectively in their roles. Finally, knowing why the organization functions as it does can assist leaders in understanding their role expectations.

Professional development focuses on the learning of knowledge that enhances the professional performance of the learner. While cultural development supports the professional performance of the learner, professional development concentrates on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities that are necessary to perform a professional role effectively. In planning for the succession of leaders, professional development focuses on leadership skills and abilities as well as the knowledge necessary to do specific tasks that are related to the particular leadership position.

The Barker County School System provided cultural development programs that assisted aspiring and new principals with information that facilitated learning the who, when, where, why, and how aspects of practice within the organization. Through the Quality-Plus Leader Academy, aspiring principals had the opportunity to meet and receive information from every division on the school system, including facilities and operations, budget and finance, human resources, and curriculum and instruction. Access to the various divisions allowed new and

aspiring principals to gain an understanding of how, when, and who to contact to obtain knowledge about how certain tasks were done in the Barker County School System. Having access to information pertinent to the business of each division in the system gave new and aspiring principals an opportunity to contextualize the practices of leading schools in the Barker County School System. Speaking about her experiences in the Quality-Plus Leader Academy, Randi Martin explained:

> I think what was good about it [Quality-Plus Leader Academy] was it gave us two things. It gave us a network of people, and it gave us a very big-picture shot of how different the departments or areas of the county work; and sort of the history of why things are the way they are. Instead of saying, 'this is what it is,' we learned this is how it happens, this is why it happens, and this is the reason we do this.

The participating principals valued the opportunity to hear from the superintendent on a regular basis to get updates on what was currently happening in the system, state, and nation; and why and how the system was addressing any issues or concerns that confronted the Barker County School System.

The Barker County School System provided professional development programs that assisted aspiring and new leaders in developing the leadership skills and abilities required to effectively perform tasks that were associated with the principalship. By extending the formal preparation of principals provided through university degree and certification programs through the curriculum of the Quality-Plus Leader Academy, the Barker County School System provided professional development that focused on the theory and research of school leadership in the context of the school system.

In addition, principals new to their positions were given just-in-time training that was scheduled at the critical times when they needed the information (see Table 5.5).

Table 5.5

*Barker County School System Just-in-Time Training*

| Date | Topic |
|---|---|
| October 1, 2008 | Budget Overview: Maximizing FTE |
| December 3, 2008 | Instructional Leadership for Improvement in Mathematics and Science |
| January 7, 2009 | Staffing Plan |
| February 4, 2009 | Selecting Quality Personnel |
| March 4, 2009 | Persistently Successful Principals |
| April 29, 2009 | Local School Plan for Improvement; Results-Based Evaluation System |

The state of Georgia requires accurate full-time equivalent (FTE) reports to be submitted in the fall of each school year. The Barker County School System offered intensive training on calculating the FTE count to maximize state funding for the staffing and operation of local schools in October just before the deadline for FTE report submission.

In December, the curriculum and instruction division assisted school leaders in focusing on improving instruction, giving principals and the opportunity to acquire instructional leadership information that would facilitate the preparation for state tests in the spring. Awareness of staffing needs was addressed in January just prior to the hiring season, and was followed in February by a session on hiring practices and strategies.

Later, in March, emphasis was placed on maintain focus and energy as tendencies are to get tired and lose focus of what is important in leading the schools. A reinforcement of the importance of being persistent in their leadership was emphasized as the end of the school year neared. Finally, a just-in-time training session was scheduled in April to reflect on the past year's school improvement plans and to establish footholds for school improvement planning for the next school year. In addition, the Barker County School System evaluation process was reviewed as the time for summative evaluations held in the final weeks of school.

*Mentoring*

In effective succession plans, formal mentoring is emphasized. Rothwell (2005) explained, "A mentor is simply a teacher. Mentoring is thus the process of teaching others. In common language, a mentor is a helper who assists people in learning" (p. 253). Mentors can assist in closing the developmental gap that exists between what a new leader knows and what the job requires him to know. Rothwell (2005) elaborated:

> Mentors are helpful because they may be in the job that the mentees aspire to, and hence they are well positioned to offer advice. After all, one key assumption of succession planning and management is that individuals cannot direct their own development for the simple reason that they have no experience base to draw on. And it is exactly in this respect that a mentor can help. (Rothwell, 2005, p. 254)

Mentors are most effective in assisting organizations to build bench strength by providing support to others to increase skills and competencies that are important to the organization. For this reason, mentors who have experienced the job of the one being developed in the same organization have the most opportunity in supporting an effective succession plan. Mentors who have experienced success in the organization and are well respected for their performance in the job bring a level of credibility that nurtures the trust of individuals who are being mentored.

Superintendent William Atkins implemented a formal mentoring program for principals in their first two years of service. The mentors chosen were retired Barker County School System principals who had been successful in leading schools in Barker County and were well respected in the system and greater community. All three principals in this study were in their first two years as principal and each had a mentor that had been formally assigned by the principal. The relationship between principal and mentor was non-evaluative. The Barker County School System mentors did not share any information with central office leaders or other school personnel.

The findings of the study indicate that the participating Barker County School System principals found great value in having a mentor. Mentoring assisted in the socialization and development of principals by being readily available to help with any questions, problems, or challenging situations that occurred in the daily operation of the school. Such terms as "Godsend" and "Lifesaver" were used when recently succeeded principals described their mentors. Underlining the importance of mentoring to his professional development, Crawford Middle School Principal, Bruce Villa, stated that his mentor was "the best professional development I have experienced, period." Having a formal mentoring program supported the Barker County School System in the development of new principals.

*Strategic in Nature*

Effective succession planning is strategic. In effective succession plans, a focused attention and systematic approach extends to all levels of the organization and aligns various practices and functions to the overall goals of the system. Effective succession planning is needs-driven and is designed to fulfill the mission and vision of the organization, not to accomplish a more cost-effective or efficient way to fill leadership positions. The long-term strategic plan of an organization should give attention to the management of the succession of leaders.

The mission, vision, and goals of an organization serve as a target for strategic planning. The alignment of practices and strategies to goals is critical for the success for any organization. One such practice is the recruitment and selection, socialization, development, and evaluation of leaders within the organization. Rothwell (2005) explained:

> To implement a strategic plan, organizations require the right people doing the right things in the right places and at the right times. Without them, strategic plans cannot be realized. Hence, leadership identification and succession are critical to the successful implementation of organizational strategy. (p. 22)

To identify and develop the "right people," an alignment of the identified competencies needed for leadership positions with the goals of the organization is necessary. In addition, socialization practices must be consistent with the mission, vision, and goals of the organization. Finally, performance assessments must measure the "right things" to determine competency and to help in finding the "right place" for the new leader.

A second level of alignment must occur between the various divisions of the organization if a strategic plan is to be implemented successfully. Those who are charged with the recruitment and selection, evaluation, and development must have a clear and consistent understanding of what competencies are required to facilitate the reaching of organizational goals. Other divisions within the organization that support the work of leaders must have an understanding of the desired abilities required to achieve the goals of the organization so the right information can be shared when decisions need to be made by the leader.

The identification of leadership competencies (see Table 5.4) that related to the overall system vision and mission was evident in the Barker County School System. The system website presented the following vision and mission statement:

> Vision: The Barker County School System will be a system of world-class schools where students acquire the knowledge and skills to be successful as they continue their education at the post secondary level and/or enter the workforce.
>
> Mission: The mission of the Barker County Schools System is to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior of each student, resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards.

There was a clear connection between the areas of recruitment and selection, development, evaluation, and the vision and mission statements of the system. The primary focus of the vision and mission statements was student learning and achievement at a high standard.

The job description for principals defined in broad terms the qualifications needed to be considered for hiring. Again, taken from the system's website:

> Experience Qualifications: Successful teaching experience preferably at the same level of administrative position to be held. Two or more years in an administrative role are preferred.
>
> Skills Qualifications: Knowledge of most effective practices in curriculum, instruction, child development; ability to work effectively with teachers and other educational colleagues; proficiency in oral and written communications; demonstrated skills in personal relations; demonstrated skills in organization and planning.

The qualifications of principal candidates sought by the Barker County School System are clearly aligned with the system's vision and mission statements' focus on student learning and achievement.

To apply for a principalship in the Barker County School System, candidates must take the Gallup Organization's PrincipalInsight™. This web-based assessment measures principal leadership talents needed to be successful in leading a school. Based on a Likert-scale, the PrincipalInsight™ assessment provides a report of measurement on each candidate's talents and abilities in the competency areas presented in Table 5.4.

The Leader Evaluation Performance Record (see Table 4.14) focused directly on each of the competencies presented in Table 5.4. The performance assessment of principals in the Barker County School System also included the Results-Based Evaluation System (RBES) which used student achievement as a primary measurement of principal performance (see Table 4.16). Hence, there was alignment of the principal evaluation system and required competencies to the goals of the organization (see Table 4.15).

The divisions of human resources, teaching and learning, and leadership development worked closely together in the Barker County Schools System to ensure there was coherence and consistency in the planning for the selection, development, and succession of principals. It was

clear that the separate divisions did not work in isolation on leadership related issues. In the area of leadership development, the Chief Human Resource Officer, Denise Franklin, explained:

> We have a council that is comprised of our Chief Academic Officer, Chief Human Resource Officer, Executive Director for Leadership Development, and Superintendent. We meet and decide what's needed for professional development based on feedback we get from principals monthly.

The Barker County School System extended succession planning throughout the central office divisions resulting in a systematic approach that coordinated the efforts of the various departments that were charged with the recruitment and selection, development, and evaluation of principals.

## Socialization

The literature on succession from the private and public sectors does not formally address the socialization of principals to any great extent. With the exception of Hart (1991, 1993), researchers and scholars, who have focused on succession, have not addressed how socialization relates to succession. While this absence in the literature may imply that there is little connection between socialization and succession, the definition of socialization encourages the consideration of inclusion in the study of succession. Socialization is the process through which an individual learns or acquires the necessary knowledge, skills, and values needed to perform an organizational role effectively (Hart, 1993; Heck, 1995; Morrison, 1993).

All individuals who succeed into a new position experience some degree of socialization through formal training (professional socialization) or job-embedded experiences (organizational socialization). In most cases in the professions, both professional socialization and organizational socialization occur (Hart, 1993; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The degree to which organizations control the professional and organizational socialization of new leaders should be considered in the discussion of succession planning.

The Barker County School System addressed the professional socialization of principals using two strategies. The first strategy involved developing relationships with local university preparation programs using cohorts (see Table 4.12). Central office leaders taught selected courses in the cohort, sharing the teaching responsibilities with university personnel. In this way, the Barker County School System was able to establish how theory and research covered in the curriculum was relevant to the context of the system. Executive Director of Leadership Development, Paul Garmin, described the "marriage between theory and application" as an important focus in the system's attempt to control the professional socialization of principals.

A second strategy used by the Barker County School System was the Quality-Plus Leader Academy curriculum. The curriculum strands of the Quality-Plus Leader Academy included:

- Foundations of Leadership;
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment;
- Human Resources;
- Budgeting and Finance;
- Community and Public Relations;
- Operations Management; and,
- Information Management.

The Quality-Plus Leader Academy curriculum strands paralleled the curriculum found in most traditional university leadership preparation programs. The curriculum served as an extension of the formal training that candidates had previously received when obtaining their school leadership credentials required by the state. All Barker County School System candidates who aspired to become principals were required to attend and to complete the Quality-Plus Leader Academy, giving them an opportunity to learn how theory and research was applied in the

context of the system. Hence, the Barker County School System made a concentrated effort to control the professional socialization of new and aspiring principals.

Control of organizational socialization in the Barker County School System was accomplished through the establishment of a culture that encouraged open communication and support with central office leaders and seasoned principals. Opportunities to meet both formally and informally with other leaders to discuss issues and share ideas were established as part of the culture. The feeling of "I am not alone" in learning how the organization operated, what the expectations were, and how to seek out resources and support was expressed by the principals in the study.

Strategically, the Barker County School System used retired principals who had been successful as school leaders in the system to serve as mentors. The impact of the mentoring program on the socialization of new principals was evident in the responses of the participating principals throughout all four interview protocols. Having access to information about the system, how things were done, who and when to contact central office personnel, and possible approaches to solving problems within the context of the system, were identified as attributes to the mentoring program. These efforts helped new principals in becoming socialized to the organizational norms and practices of school leadership in the Barker County School System.

The intentional effort of the Barker County School System to control the socialization of principals was part of the system's attempt to ensure that the succession of school leaders was effective in supporting a smooth transition into the position. While not specifically covered in the literature on the characteristics of effective succession planning, the practice of controlling the socialization was identified as being an important component to the management and planning of succession in the Barker County School System.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how one effective school system experienced the succession of school leaders. The Barker County School System was an effective school system as defined by the number of schools meeting the standards set by the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) mandates of the state of Georgia (see Table 4.4). Central office leaders and principals who had recently succeeded into their positions were interviewed. From the experiences of the participants, specific practices involving the recruitment and selection, development, socialization, and evaluation of principals were identified.

Comparing the findings presented in Chapter 4 to the characteristics of effective succession planning as found in the literature presented in this chapter, it is evident that many of the components that promote effective succession are present in the practices of the Barker County School System. The involvement and support of Superintendent William Atkins; the shared responsibility in recruitment, selection, and development; the identification of competencies; the emphasis on leadership development; the formal mentoring program; and being strategic in nature were all components that emerged from the analysis of the data. In addition, the control of socialization was determined to be a characteristic of the Barker County School System's practices related to the management of succession.

In most research studies, there are additional findings, ideas, or concepts that emerge. The following and final chapter presents unexpected or unique themes that were generated from the study. In addition, as a study of a single case, limitations of the study are discussed as well as implications for future research based on the findings is shared.

# CHAPTER 6

## STUDY SUMMARY, UNANTICIPATED FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine how one school system experienced the succession of principals. A single school system was chosen as a case with the purpose of identifying the nature, characteristics, and practices related to the succession of principals through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants. The goals of the study were to identify how one school system experienced succession and to provide a description of how this school system managed and planned for the succession of principals.

The overarching research questions that guided this study included:

4. How do school systems control the socialization and development of their school leaders?
5. How do school systems plan for the succession of school leaders?
6. Which practices related to succession are experienced in successful school systems?

A summary of the research design; unexpected findings; implications for research, policy, practice, and leadership preparation and development programs; and the final thoughts of the researcher follow in this chapter.

### Summary of Research Design

A qualitative case study methodology was used to address the research questions through the perspectives of the participants. Like all qualitative research, this study was interpretative in nature (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), and sought to understand how succession was experienced

through the interpretation of the perspectives of the participants and the constructed meanings of their experiences.

The theoretical perspective of this study was phenomenological interpretivism as the study sought "to describe the essence of a phenomenon" (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hopey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009, p. 689) through the interpretation of the experiences of the participants. This study focused on the phenomenon of the succession of school principals in a case study of one school system in the state of Georgia.

In reviewing the literature, there was no evidence of previous studies that examined how systems planned and managed the succession of principals; therefore, there were no prior studies to provide perspectives, theories, or concepts related to how school systems actually managed or planned for the succession of principals. To develop an initial understanding of how this system managed and planned for leader succession, a qualitative case study was identified as the most applicable research method to examine the phenomenon of principal succession as experienced in the lives of the school system personnel (Huberman & Middlebrooks, 2000; Yin, 1997, 2009).

The sources of data for the study included:

1. Transcripts from 24 individual interviews of the 6 participants.
2. Fieldnotes gathered before and during each interview.
3. Artifacts collected such as information from the system website, documents related to various practices involving the development and training of new principals, and job descriptions.

Three recently promoted principals and three central office leaders, including the superintendent participated in the study. Each participant was interviewed four times over a three-month period using protocols that addressed the following topical areas:

1. Socialization;
2. Professional development;
3. Evaluation; and,
4. Succession.

The protocols were constructed based on the extant literature in each topical area. The length of interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes..

The analysis of the interview transcripts was accomplished by using the method of phenomenological reduction modeled after the work of Hycner (1985). Units of general meaning from the transcripts were identified and then reduced to units of relevant meaning. Units of relevant meaning were those data from the units of general meaning that were relevant to the research questions. The units of relevant meaning were then coded. The initial codes were then categorized into secondary codes. Emerging themes were then identified leading to the findings (see Table 3.10).

In phenomenological research, interviewing is the main method of data collection (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). While the majority of analysis involved the spoken words of the participants presented through the transcripts, fieldnotes and artifacts were examined and were used to assist in the triangulation of the data and to substantiate the findings.

## Unanticipated Findings

One strength of qualitative research is the opportunity for the researcher to identify "*unanticipated* [italics in original] phenomenon and influences" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22) that emerge as literature is reviewed, data are analyzed, and findings are generated. The study of principal succession in the Barker County School System produced unanticipated findings related to socialization as a succession strategy; the loose-coupling of systems and how it may

affect succession planning and management; and the lack of concern for planning for succession at the building level by the principals in the study.

*Socialization as a Succession Strategy*

For the purposes of this study, socialization was defined as the process through which an individual learns or acquires the necessary knowledge, skills, and values needed to perform an organizational role effectively (Hart, 1993; Heck, 1995; Morrison, 1993). Individuals who succeed into leadership positions experience socialization to their new role as a school leader; therefore, socialization should be identified as a critical component to the succession of leaders. However, there is not a formal identification of socialization as a key part of the succession process found in the literature.

This study found that controlling the socialization of principals was a succession strategy used by the Barker County School System. The deliberate involvement and partnerships with formal leader preparation programs, the extension of formal training programs were examples described by the participants as ways that they enabled new leaders to become more familiar with leadership in the context of the organization; hence, the system purposefully attempted to control the professional socialization of new principals.

Organizational socialization was controlled in the Barker County School System through several formal and informal mechanisms. These mechanisms include a formal mentoring program, regularly-held formal meetings among principals, and the establishment of cultural norms of open communication throughout the system. Meetings over breakfasts and lunches involving principals at the same level (elementary, middle, or high) or in the same clusters (schools at all levels that shared the same students over time and served the same community)

complimented the more formal mechanisms to socialize individuals to the work of the principalship.

*The Loose-Coupling of School Systems and Succession Planning*

Succession planning requires the attention of all levels of an organization (Rothwell, 2005). While it is imperative that the top executive is committed and involved in succession management and planning, managers throughout the organization should be engaged in the process as well (Lundberg, 1987). The identification of talent, the on-the-job development of future leaders, and the assessment of performance take place take place "in the trenches" of the organization more so than from the higher echelons of the organizations. For this reason, managers throughout the organization should be involved in the succession process and there should be a coherent understanding of the succession process throughout the organization.

The challenge for school systems to have coherency in succession planning throughout the entire organization is compounded by the hierarchical structure of K-12 public education systems. Educational organizations have been described as being loosely coupled (Weick, 1976). Loosely coupled systems tend to have more dissonance in their overall operation of the organization as a whole. Loosely coupled systems are challenged in having a coherent implementation of strategies and behaviors that reflect the organization's values. Orton and Weick (1990) explained:

> Loose coupling is typically portrayed as the end point of a scale that extends from tightly coupled to loosely coupled. Tightly coupled systems are portrayed as having responsive components that do not act independently, whereas loosely coupled systems are portrayed as having independent components that do not act responsively. (p. 205)

Using the description of loose coupling by Orton and Weick, a "component" in a school system can be defined as an individual school. To the extent that the school responds to the needs and

desired behaviors of the school system would determine the degree of coupling that is present in any particular school-to-system relationship.

Schools have been described as organizations within a larger organization. Bidwell (1965) described, "The school is to a substantial degree a self-contained organizational unit" (p. 976). While individual schools may be considered as being at a lower level within a larger organization (school system) comprised of smaller organizations (individual schools), often times schools function as self-contained organizations independent from the larger system. Hence, school systems are often loosely coupled.

Although there was evidence of system coherence, the Barker County Schools System's succession planning and management efforts were challenged by the loose coupling of the system. While participating principals in the study believed that they had a responsibility to assist in the development of assistant principals, the central office leaders felt that there was not enough attention given to the planning for succession at the school level. The Executive Director of Human Resources, Denise Franklin, explained:

> We are dependent on principals in that process. I think that our principals see the need for a succession plan, but I don't think that they have the ownership that we would like them to have. If you are in a high school and you have 10 assistant principals, and you come in and submit your resignation, you have to be able to say, 'I have four people I have been working with and any one of them can take my job.'

The principals participating in this study, while recognizing the responsibility to help develop their assistant principals, did not talk about preparing leaders to take their positions as principal in their schools.

*The Sense of Urgency and Career Stage*

Related to the challenge of loose coupling, the sense of urgency for a succession plan was not as obvious in the responses given by the participating principals in the Barker County School

System. The absence of concern by acting principals to prepare their own successors may be attributable to the career stage at which the participating principals were at the time of the study. One of the limitations of this study was the exclusion of the voices of veteran principals who were at the advanced stages of their careers as principals. There remains the question of whether veteran principals in the Barker County School System consider the preparation and development of assistant principals for taking over their position as principal when they retire or move into another position outside of the school.

## Implications

The succession of school leaders and the practices of school systems in managing and planning for succession have implications for future research, policy makers, school system leaders, and higher education institutions. The broader implications include examining how succession theories and the planning and management of succession in the private sectors as well as the public sectors outside of education can be used to inform the succession needs of public school systems.

### *Implications for Research*

To increase the capacity of school system leaders to control and to manage effectively the succession of school leaders, more research examining different school systems is needed. This study focused on a single large urban system that had consistently found success in meeting the mandates of the state AYP. The findings of this study may or may not relate to other large urban school systems. More study is needed to determine how the context of systems may influence attempts at planning and managing of succession.

Since most of the literature on succession theory, organizational theory, and human resource management theory is found in the private sector and public sector outside of the field

of education, attention to how these various concepts may be incorporated into the study of succession in educational organizations should be pursued. While there is argument as to the extent business and industry practices may be applied to the public education sector (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008), a look at the various existing theories addressing succession, socialization, and human resource management is warranted.

One example of theory that may be applied to the succession of school leaders is found in the subject of socialization. Socialization has been studied in the area of organizational theory (Clausen, 1968; Morrison, 1993; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), and has been studied in the context of the principalship (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Crow, 2006; Heck, 1995; McGough, 2003). A gap in the literature exists, aside from Hart (1991), where there has not been any elaboration on how socialization is related to succession and how socialization theories can be used in the planning for the succession of leaders. In speaking of leader succession in schools, Hart (1991) stated, "The dynamic interactions among social and personal factors examined by socialization theories, however, are underemphasized by traditional succession frameworks. This omission leaves important gaps in knowledge about leader succession processes and outcomes" (p. 451). Since Hart espoused these thoughts, no research could be found that addressed the coupling of socialization related to succession in private or public sectors.

Hart (1991) contributed to the literature by connecting socialization to succession; however, there has not been any literature on how school systems plan and manage leader succession related to socialization theory. Examining how school system succession management practices relate to socialization theory can assist in understanding how certain practices may or may not help school leaders become successfully socialized into the new role of

school leader, thus contributing to the knowledge base concerning effective succession strategies.

As important to the examining of various theories and how they may be applied to the practices and functions of school systems is the identification of barriers to effective succession that are unique to educational organizations. The discussion of barriers specific to educational organizations was not in the scope of this study; however, further investigation into how the bureaucratic nature, political nature, and system resources act as potential barriers would help in the understanding of the succession process in school systems. Such research would assist in illuminating succession concerns for both policy makers and practitioners.

*Implications for Policy*

A requirement for being eligible to succeed into school leadership positions has traditionally been the obtainment of a leadership certificate or license. While the obtainment of a leadership certificate may be a barrier for some individuals who aspire to be school leaders, it is generally accepted as a necessary gateway to leadership because of the importance of maintaining the integrity of the profession (Durley, 2005). Professional certifications are mandated either by the federal government or by the state government. In the case of education, professional credentialing is monitored and governed by state policy.

In most cases, the awarding of a leadership certificate is tied to a graduate program offered through an institution of higher education. To succeed into the principalship, one is required to have completed a course of study that typically includes courses in operational functions (e.g., facility management, finance, and human resources), legal aspects of education, and instructional issues (e.g., supervision and school improvement planning).

The study of leader succession has important implications for state policymakers dealing with certification requirements. There has been a rising concern over traditional leader preparation programs not meeting the needs of school systems (Hess & Kelly, 2007). A call has been made to "reinvent the principalship to meet the needs of schools in the 21st century" (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). Policymakers should ask the question: Do current certification requirements meet the needs of today's school systems and school systems of the future?

To assist in answering this question, research on the succession of principals plays a critical role. If principals succeeding into school leadership positions are not equipped to be effective leaders, the preparation programs that lead to the certification must be examined. Learning more about the processes of effective succession can provide information that will help inform policymakers of adjustments that could be made to current certification rules and regulations.

Policymakers can also examine current funding formulas to determine if there is a possibility for making available resources to districts to develop effective succession strategies. The Barker County School System supported the development of a leadership pipeline and a formal mentoring program for new principals with external funds received in the form of a grant from the Broad Foundation. Not all school systems can rely on external funding to help support the leader succession process. If "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006, p. 3), and "few things in education succeed less than leadership succession" (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 21); then it is important to find ways to support school systems in their attempts to implement practices that nurture effective succession of school leaders.

*Implications for Practice*

Effective succession planning is strategic (Collins & Collins, 2007; Friedman, 1987b; Pynes, 2004; Rothwell, 2005; Schall, 1997). Decisions made in the management of succession should be based on the organization's mission and goals. The selection of new leaders should be dependent on how well that individual will assist in moving the organization in a direction that is aligned and consistent with the goals sought by the organization.

In school systems, decisions in hiring in-coming principals to replace out-going principals must be made around the desired direction of the school in terms of performance and meeting system goals. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) found that school systems may seek a leader who has the skills and abilities to sustain and improve the performance of the school (planned continuity), or the system may seek a leader who has the skills and abilities to turn around the performance trends of the school (planned discontinuity). In effective succession planning, both planned continuity and planned discontinuity are decided strategically in relation to the goals of the system. If time is taken to define the type of leader needed, then the effectiveness of the succession will be left to chance.

Defining the type of leader necessary to be effective in a particular organization is essential for strategic succession planning to occur (Fulmer & Conger, 2004; Lawler, 2008; Rothwell, 2005). Identified competencies that are clear and consistent with obtaining the goals of the organization are critical in a strategic succession plan (see Appendix A). In addition, the same competencies that are defined for recruitment and selection purposes should be used as the focus in the professional development of personnel and measures in the performance assessment of personnel (See Figure 6.1).

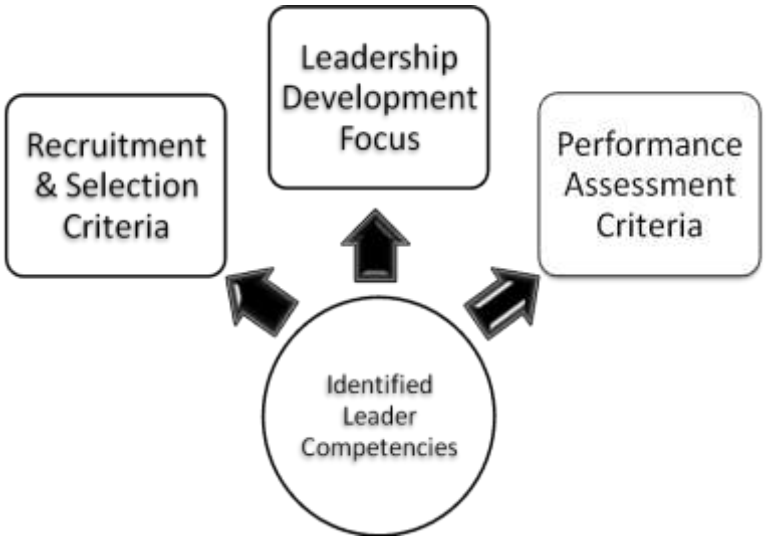


*Figure 6.1* Strategic Use of Leader Competencies

School systems generally have missions that are centered on student learning, closing achievement gaps, and creating healthy learning environments for all learners. Research has identified behaviors and attributes of school leaders that positively influence the performance of teachers and students (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). The Barker County School System identified competencies that were drawn from various professional organizations' (e.g., NASSP, NAESP, & the Gallup Organization) research findings on the knowledge, skills, and abilities of successful school leaders (see Table 5.4).
Using the research, the Barker County School System identified the competencies that were aligned with the system's goals.

While certain leadership competencies should be applied to all settings, the development of competency models should be driven by the contextual needs of the school system. For example, an urban school with a highly-diverse population may have different needs than a rural non-diverse system. For this reason, the simple adoption of generic competencies that are measured by state assessment tools may not be the most effective approach to the identification

of competencies. Once desired competencies are identified, recruitment and selection strategies, professional development curriculum, and assessment criteria can be established.

In creating recruitment and selection criteria, school system leaders should identify which of the desired competencies can be developed and which must be selected for (Rothwell, 2005). An example of an attribute that might be considered a competency to be selected for in the Barker County School System was a passion for quality (see Table 5.4). Passion would be hard to develop purposefully as it is considered an inherent quality that is based on emotion and feeling and results in some level of conviction. On the other hand, the ability to lead teams and create collaborative environments can be developed. All competencies, whether selected or developed should be assessed using evaluation instruments that measured the competencies required for effective leadership within the context of the system and school.

Developing a pipeline of leaders can assist in succession planning for school systems. Having "bench strength" for leadership is essential in ensuring smooth transitions. The development of a pipeline assumes the selection of internal candidates who will be developed and trained to take over leadership roles. While there is still an opportunity for individuals to self-select, the identification of individuals with potential (tapping) is also an accepted strategy in the identification of potential candidates. Tapping must be based on present competencies identified as needed by the system and the potential for development of those competencies in the person being tapped.

Principals can play a key role in the selection process by identifying potential candidates and by helping to develop leadership competencies. To ensure that candidate selection aligns with the mission and goals of the system, principals must understand and accept the leadership competencies that have been identified by the system. In this sense, succession planning should

be transparent throughout the system with potential candidates, principals, and central office leaders having a shared understanding of the process and the competencies necessary to be effective school leaders.

Professional socialization helps prepare candidates to the profession of school leadership. Organizational socialization assists in the preparation of individuals for school leadership in the context of the school system. School systems should develop strategies that will help control professional and organizational socialization. Superintendents should seek out partnerships with university preparation programs and encourage open dialogue about the leadership needs of the system. In addition, systems should consider implementing leadership development programs that extend the traditional leadership preparation curricula.

In the Barker County School System, the curriculum for the Quality-Plus Leader Academy closely paralleled the content covered in traditional university leadership preparation programs. The Quality-Plus Leader Academy curriculum assisted the system leaders in extending the professional socialization of principals by contextualizing theory into the practices of the Barker County School System.

Superintendents should not leave the organizational socialization of new principals up to chance. The Barker County School System controlled organizational socialization with a culture of open communication, peer collaboration, and formal mentoring. Controlling organizational socialization can be particularly important when external hires for the principalship are made. Giving new principals the opportunity to learn the processes and practices of leadership in the context of the system through open communication, peer collaboration, and mentoring from a veteran principal who has found success as a leader enables new hires to be socialized to the organization in a manner that is aligned with the system mission and goals.

*Implications for Principal Preparation and Development Programs*

Succession planning and management should be included in the curriculum of school leadership preparation programs. Course work in human resource management, personnel evaluation, and professional development should incorporate succession planning and management. Superintendent certification coursework that focuses on strategic planning and human resource development would be appropriate for presenting succession planning and management as a topic for discussion and exploration.

University leader preparation programs often exist in isolation from the school systems of the students they serve. Finding ways to reach out and communicate with school system leaders can help preparation programs understand more about the leadership expectations, challenges, and needs in the context of individual school systems. By understanding the context of school systems that leaders are being prepared, preparation programs can start bridging the gap between theory and practice.

One strategy used by the Barker County School System and several local universities was to develop relationships that included cohorts of students. Additionally, Barker County School System leaders assisted in the delivery of the curriculum in these cohort programs. While many university faculty involved in delivering the curriculum in educational leadership programs have had some previous experience in public education, they can become isolated from the actual work that takes place in schools. Having expert practitioners who are central office leaders and veteran principals serve as guest lecturers can help provide students with current context for learning.

## Concluding Thoughts

Principal succession is inevitable. Planned or unplanned, managed or unmanaged, succession in organizations occurs and when succession takes place in positions of leadership, organizational performance particularly in high accountability environments is at risk. Nothing could be closer to this reality than the succession of school principals.

The principal has influence over student learning. While the degree of this effectiveness continues to be explored, the research to date supports the thought that principals play a vital role in the basic function of schooling which is teaching and learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2008; Supovitz et al., 2010). When the leadership of a school changes, there is a risk of losing intellectual capital. Without attention to planning for the succession of principals, the ability of the new principal either to continue the direction of the school's performance or to make changes in the school's performance is left to chance. System leaders can no longer wait for a year or more to determine if a new principal is going to be successful in leading the school to improved performance.

The high-stakes accountability environment that currently exists in education and that will continue to be present in the future demands system coherence. Teachers are held accountable for the learning of their students, principals are held accountable for the performance of their teachers, and superintendents are held accountable for the performance of all schools within the system. A systematic approach and implementation of sound succession planning and management is critical in establishing the coherence required to meet the mandates of state and federal accountability measures. No longer can the succession of principals be left to chance.

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