SUCCESSION TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:

CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE FOR PRINCIPALS

A Record of Study

by

BRENDA ANNE RUSSELL BERRY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2004

Major Subject: Educational Administration

SUCCESSION TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:

CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE FOR PRINCIPALS

A Record of Study

by

BRENDA ANNE RUSSELL BERRY

Submitted to Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Approved as to style and content by:

David A. Erlandson (Chair of Committee)	John R. Hoyle (Member)
Luana Zellner (Member)	Collie W. Conoley (Member)
Yvonna S. Lincoln (Head of Department)	

May 2004

Major Subject: Educational Administration

ABSTRACT

Succession to School Leadership:

Challenge and Response for Principals. (May 2004)

Brenda Anne Russell Berry, B.S., Southwest Texas State University;

M.Ed., Southwest Texas State University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. David A. Erlandson

Between 1998 and 2000, seventy principals were named in the Austin Independent School District to succeed other principals. Several schools had two or more principals in that period. Not only is there an immediate cost when a principal is not successful, but there is also a cost associated with repair or replacement. Knowing what is necessary in the induction experience to make a principal succeed is critical. We have an obligation to these principals, their teachers, the taxpayers, and most of all, the students, to maximize their success.

This study explored the experiences of elementary principals in the Austin Independent School District who recently succeeded other principals. Issues addressed included the principals' perceptions of their experiences and the impact of those experiences on their effectiveness. Findings will be offered as recommendations that may better inform principals who step into the succession role in the district.

Questionnaires were sent to elementary principals named between 1998 and 1999 and still in those same schools in 2001-2002. Based on responses, principals were

invited to participate in focus groups. Based on written responses and participation in focus groups, three principals were selected as case studies.

Data revealed that succession principals had positive experiences including communication with others, establishment of procedures and routines, relationship building, and knowledge of district policies and procedures. Negative experiences included the effects of prior school leadership, challenging relationships, communication issues, and lack of support. As a result of these experiences, principals developed inner strength and powerful relationships with peers.

It was recommended that support for succession principals continue beyond the induction year and include: trained mentors; time to dialogue with mentors and peer principals; quick responses to questions or requests for support; and receipt, early in the process, of critical information regarding role definition, expectations, district policies, and district procedures.

Recommendations for further study included: investigating the succession experiences of secondary principals; comparing the succession experiences of principals named from within the district to those named from outside the district; and studying the relationship between the rate of principal retention and teacher retention.

DEDICATION

The completion of this work would never have been possible without three very important people, and it is to them that I dedicate this work.

My mother, Margaret Younger, and her never-ending support made all of this possible. She has believed in me since I began this endeavor and has been my strongest advocate in making this dream of mine a reality.

My father, J. E. Younger, whose calm strength I admire more that I can say, has inspired me with his wisdom, his courage, and his enduring sense of humor. How fortunate our family is to have him in our lives.

My amazing son, Kristofer Wainwright Berry, really is the *wind beneath my wings*. He has always supported my endeavors to advance my education, even when it meant sacrificing our time together. Beyond all else, he is by far the greatest joy in my life, my most precious blessing, and the accomplishment of which I am most proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the guidance and influence of some other very significant people in my life, I would never be at this point. So I am compelled to mention them here.

My brother, Scott Russell, has encouraged me throughout this endeavor. He is a wonderful brother, a great uncle to my son, and an amazing father to his children. He is an inspiration to me.

My aunt, Elizabeth Swanson, a retired teacher herself, has been a cheerleader from afar. She has never doubted that I would complete this chapter of my life.

Dr. Bob Alexius and Patsy Alexius have been there from the beginning for me. Their constant support, advice, and true friendship will always be special to me.

Four very special people were excellent role models in my teenage years. Mr. Yancy Yarbrough, Mrs. Merle Yarbrough, Mrs. Lucille Cates, and Mrs. Robbie Zunker, all of whom have left this earthly life for very special places in Heaven, will be walking across that stage with me as I receive my diploma.

Special thanks once again to my dear friend, Dr. Sylvia Hornback. You took a dream that we shared as we drove along Mopac one day in the Spring of 1998 and turned it into an opportunity known as the Austin ISD A&M Cohort. You made our dream come true in a very extraordinary way. And when life took its difficult turns, you were always there. You never let me fall. You listened, even to the hard stuff, always believing in me and reminding me of who I am and of the dream in my heart. I owe you so much. I love you, my friend.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The replacement of a person holding an influential position, such as a school principal, creates reverberations throughout the organization. As this is an experience of great magnitude, there are varying impacts on relationships, expectations, and outcomes. All feel the effects. The succession experience causes the leadership issue to be on the forefront of consciousness. The newly appointed principal strives to be successful under pressures of personal and professional transitions (Erlandson, 1994: Hart, 1993).

Hart and Bredeson (1996) identified three leader succession stages. The taking-hold stage is a time of concrete experience and active experimentation, in which there is little time for making sense of things. The immersion stage is a time of reflection, in which more abstract understanding of the nature of the school takes place during examination of both the first stage and the social assumptions directing behavior. The reshaping stage is heavily action orientated with active experimentation and concrete observation. It is a time of deeper reflection of what was learned during the immersion stage.

_____

This record of study follows the style and format of the *Journal of Educational Research.*

In a study of new principals in central Texas, the skills most needed to perform their jobs were associated with initiating and overseeing changes in the school. These include leadership skills, skills required for building a culture and a climate that supports learning. They also need to be aware of best current practices and of ways to stay current with educational changes. In addition, new principals must have information about district policies and regulations (Erlandson, 1994, p. 9).

Literature suggests that leadership preparation programs are not relevant (Maxwell, 1993), particularly for females (Shakeshaft, 1989). As early as the late 1940's, when schools began to replace women in school administration with returning male GI's, it was apparent that men and women were prepared differently for leadership positions (Blount, 1999). In a three-year study of women enrolled in a university course entitled "Women in Educational Leadership", Irby and Brown (1995) identified three emerging themes expressed by participants. They were: lack of self-confidence, naïve perceptions regarding career advancement, misconceptions of networking, and failure to network. During the transition process, succession principals face challenges that are shaped by gender and ethnicity of the new principal, as well as the unique culture of each school setting. Ignoring these differences is ignoring the reality of the process of leader succession in today's schools.

Based on a review of the literature on succession, the question of whether it is a salutary or disruptive process depends on the situation and the conditions that exist. These differences may be viewed as having positive, negative, or no effect

(Hart & Bredeson, 1996). Knowledge of what is to be expected can play an important part in a smooth transition. An effective succession process can be positive and productive if the succession principal understands the change process and the culture of the new school population and community (Brock & Grady, 1995, P. xi).

Statement of the Problem

  While settings and challenges do vary, all principals, regardless of previous experience in the principalship, have similar needs as they learn to fit into the complex web of social interactions and relationships that exist in a new situation. Succession principals must go beyond fitting in as they learn to be effective. They must also learn to be independent forces in the web in order to generate a positive impact on the educational program (Hart, 1993). Therefore, it is critical to ensure that all administrators who are succeeding other principals are given direction concerning mentoring from superiors, time demands, and changes of the school culture (Roberts, 1992a).

  It is important to learn how the succession process for principals can be improved. Learning what succession principals face and how to best support them in successful transitions must occur if we are to ensure their optimum opportunities for success.

  Between 1998 and 2000, seventy principals were named in the Austin Independent School District to succeed other principals. Several schools had two or

more principals in the three-year period. Informal individual conversations, as well as small group interactions with many of those succession principals, found similar issues which have impacted their experiences. Time management, personnel concerns, and a sense of isolation were often mentioned by these principals.

Each time a principal is not successful, the district loses. Not only is there an immediate cost, but there is also a cost associated with repair or replacement. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the district and the students it serves for a principal to go through the induction years as successfully as possible. However, we do not fully know what is necessary in an induction experience to make a principal succeed. Yet we have an obligation to these principals, their teachers, to the taxpayer, and, most of all, to the students, to maximize their success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of elementary principals in the Austin Independent School District who recently succeeded other principals. Issues addressed included the principals' perceptions of the experiences themselves and the impact of those experiences on their effectiveness (what they were able to accomplish and what they were unable to accomplish according to their personal standards and goals and varying forms of documentation). The information learned will be utilized to offer recommendations that may better serve principals who step into the succession role in the Austin Independent School District.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What has been the experience of a selected group of principals who recently succeeded other principals?

2. What impact has this experience had upon their effectiveness as principals?

3. How can the succession process be improved to better facilitate principal succession?

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply:

Effectiveness of the principal refers to the accomplishments made by the principal during the succession process as determined by personal goals and standards and documentation such as self-assessment, Academic Excellence Indicator System Reports, parent and student surveys, staff turnover, and special school recognitions.

Participants were elementary principals who succeeded other principals in the Austin Independent School District between 1998 and 1999 and were still principals in those same schools in the 2001-2002 school year.

Perception refers to an attitude, impression, or preconceived notion.

Principal succession refers to the replacement of a campus principal by a new principal due to resignation, retirement, reassignment, or promotion.

Methodology

Population

The population investigated in this study consisted of elementary school principals in the Austin Independent School District who succeeded other principals between 1998 and 1999 and were still principals in the same schools in the 2001-2002 school year. Twenty-three elementary principals were named between 1998-1999 and were still in those schools in 2001-2002. Those 23 were contacted regarding participation in this study. Fourteen principals provided written response to questionnaires. Based on their responses given and with attention to gender, ethnicity, and experience, eight principals were selected to participate in two focus groups. Three principals who responded to the questionnaires and participated in a focus group were selected as case studies. These three participants were selected based on their responses to both the written questionnaires and their input in the focus groups, as well as with attention to gender, ethnicity, and experience.

Procedures

Written permission and support from the superintendent's designee to conduct this research in the district was obtained. Following a face-to-face meeting, each participant received and signed a copy of a participant consent form. The participants also responded in writing to three guiding questions. The signed consent forms and written responses are at the home of this researcher under lock and key.

Following review and classification of the written responses received, a set of guiding questions was prepared. In order to gain further insight into the issues, which had emerged in the written responses, eight principals whose responses were felt to offer the most insight were invited to participate in one of two focus groups. The focus groups were conducted and audio taped. One was on the campus of a participant and one on the campus of the researcher. Three individuals naturally evolved as respondents whose written and oral responses offered the best opportunity for individual case studies and further answers to questions that evolved as a result of the focus groups. Case study interviews were conducted on each participant's campus within four weeks of the focus groups. Additional communication took place via face-to-face meetings and phone calls.

Instrumentation

Methods used for data collection were written responses, the semi-structured focus groups, and the more specific questions utilized in the individual interviews. Based on the written responses received, additional questions were left unanswered. In order to further investigate those questions, focus groups were formed to allow conversation with principals who had responded to the questionnaires in such a manner that I determined their insights would be most valuable to the study. Dialogue in the focus groups was guided by a set of basic questions and of others that emerged. They were also based on written responses, my review of the literature, and my own interest. Rather than being predetermined, the exact wording and order of the questions were a

result of the dialogue. This allowed conversation to naturally emerge spontaneously with questions emerging throughout the discussion.

   The participants selected for further study represented a cross section of gender, ethnicities, and administrative experience and also shared experiences that the researcher felt would add the greatest richness to the study. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded. Names of the participants were not divulged. Information was reviewed utilizing member checks with the participants (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993).

Data Analysis

Qualitative descriptive data retrieved from written responses and interactive interviews were analyzed and interpreted according to the principals outlined in *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods* (Erlandson et al., 1993). Construction of a process to compare emerging themes was identified in order to determine succession experiences, principal effectiveness during succession, and possible improvements to the succession process.

I began by reviewing and topically coding the written responses I received. I found that several categories were consistent. I also used a triangulation process to code and categorize the transcribed focus group conversations. Reflexive journal entries, member checks, and peer debriefing for ensuring trustworthiness were also critical throughout my study (Erlandson et al., 1993; Linclon & Guba, 1985).

Following an intense review of the categories and remaining questions that had emerged, I proceeded with case studies of three participants who I believed could best answer those final questions. They were selected based on the nature of their experiences and their responses in the focus groups.

These interviews were transcribed, coded, and triangulated as well. Member checks and peer debriefing were also utilized. Analyzing and refining the methodology took place as necessary as a result of the data collection process (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Significance of the Study

This study focuses on the experiences of elementary principals who succeeded another principal in the Austin Independent School District. As previously stated, seventy principals were appointed to succeed other principals between 1998 and 2000. As increasing numbers of educators are becoming principals, it is important to ensure that the process fosters their success as campus leaders (Hart & Bredeson, 1996).

While the district has provided measures to support the succession principals, those measures have not proven to completely fulfill the needs of these principals. The first years on a campus are critical. The school leader has much to learn in the process and the need for an effective succession program is great.

Much attention is paid to ensuring that new teachers are provided with support through staff development and mentoring programs. As the instructional leader of the campus, the principal should certainly receive the same attention to support (Parkay & Hall, 1992).

This study intended to discover what could be learned by the experiences of elementary school leaders who recently succeeded other principals. The knowledge gained provides AISD with recommendations for improvement in the succession process. By supporting succession principals in their efforts to become effective campus leaders, a more effective process will in turn impact the district as a whole.

Organization of the Record of Study

This study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter I defines the problem specification and design of the research.

Chapter II contains the review of the literature, which provided the framework for the succession principal, support for succession principals, and measures for success for succession principals.

Chapter III describes the methodology of the research. The purpose of the research is to explore the experiences of elementary principals in the Austin Independent School District who recently succeeded other principals. Written responses to questions were gathered, focus groups were convened, and case studies were utilized to gather data.

Chapter IV reports the questionnaire responses and focus groups discussions and those findings.

Chapter V details the three case studies. Each study contains an introduction, participant's story, and summary of findings.

Chapter VI reports the written, group, individual, and overall findings of the study.

Chapter VII is the concluding chapter of the study. It contains a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and further study. The recommendations are based on the literature review, and findings from written responses, focus groups, and case studies.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The overarching question of this research is: How can the succession process be improved to better facilitate the effectiveness of succession principals? The purpose of this literature review was to access and assess research that examines 1) roles and skills for today's principals, 2) the succession principal, 3) measures of effectiveness for succession principals, and 4) support for succession principals. This review of pertinent literature set the stage for exploration regarding the facilitation of success for succession principals.

Roles and Skills for Today's Principals

Today's school principal is expected to wear a myriad of hats and to possess a multitude of skills. A plethora of books, manuals, research articles, and college and university courses all are provided to tender advice on preparing, developing, and honing her/his leadership skills. This array of offerings is testimony to the importance of the role of the principalship.

Over the years the role of the campus leader has gone through a substantial transformation. Principals are expected to effectively lead and efficiently manage their schools while being sensitive and passionate about their schools and students (Deal & Peterson, 1994). Principal preparation programs teach sets of skills, which become

knowledge bases to be utilized in the actual undertaking of the leadership of a campus (Bredeson, 1991).

A study of principals in urban schools in Texas pointed out the need for a comprehensive preservice preparation program. Such a program would include extensive background in the areas of curriculum and instruction, assessment, resource allocation, legal doctrines, and principles addressing student and personnel issues, knowledge of professional development, student services and cultural systems, and the development of strong interpersonal skills (Erlandson, 1994).

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) took a stand for adequate preservice and in-service programs designed to train and certify school administrators. A set of standards, guidelines, and expectations for those programs address seven leadership outcome goals, each with its own set of competencies and skills, and system components to guide school administrator training. These goals are: creation and maintenance of an open learning environment; building support for education; effective implementation of an appropriate curriculum; effective implementation of instructional delivery; ongoing effective staff development; management of operations and facilities; use of research; and the basis of planning and problem solving (Hoyle, 1995).

Research suggests that school leaders need a background in the theoretical and historical foundations of educational administration as well as knowledge of the following: models of structure in schools, individuals and their roles in the schools, the school culture and climate, power and politics in schools, external environments,

effectiveness and quality, decision-making, motivation, communication, leadership, and the school as a social system (Hoy & Miskel, 1994).

In addition to a strong knowledge base and background, principals must possess strong leadership skills. The needs of the school community, the expectations of the society, and working conditions have become increasingly complex as well as difficult and stressful, and have placed never-ending demands for time and energy on the school leaders (Parkay & Hall, 1992). They must be able to balance the demands of a role that becomes more demanding. Because the educational system faces constant change, one's resilience is seen as the most important factor managing those changes successfully (Conner, 1992). Managing the shift to being the administrator of a tremendously complex organization that is both extremely specialized and extensively regulated, is necessary (Deal & Peterson, 1994).

Today's principals must be organized managers, able to solve technical problems analytically and rationally, as well as artistic and passionate leaders able to resolve symbolic dilemmas. They must also empower others to do the same, remembering that a blend of "passion and order, faith and results, meaning and measurement" (Deal & Petersen, 1994, p 114) is needed.

Principals must learn to be designers as they utilize their foundational knowledge to establish and maintain successful learning environments. Attention must be paid to leadership values and beliefs, professional knowledge and expertise, experiential knowledge, empirical knowledge, theoretical knowledge, leadership processes and behaviors, and leader intent. Thus, the principal becomes the architect and her/his

success can be greatly affected by expert thinking and creativity (Hart & Bredesen, 1996).

The role of the school principal comes with conflicting pressures, which create tensions that must be dealt with every day. This requires the campus leader to define her/his leadership style as it relates to being collaborative or authoritarian, masculine or feminine, instructional leader or manager, and leader or servant (Ripley, 1997).

Improving school leadership effectiveness is important in other countries as well. A study of heads of 12 schools in the United Kingdom found that staffs in the schools felt that their leaders were effective because they were led by clear values, people centered, goal oriented, inward and outward facing, and able to manage several issues at the same time. Attention must be paid to reflection on values, critical thinking, problem solving, management, cognitive and emotional development, and both intra and inter personal skills of the school leader (Day, 2000).

One researcher asserts that every principal should learn to use her/his leadership style effectively. He suggests that there are three primary quality types. *Dynamics* are highly charismatic. *Adaptives* adapt well to a variety of situations but are not charismatic or creative. *Creatives* are imaginative. Glanz also identifies three secondary quality types. *Aggressives* are highly opinionated, perhaps contentious. *Assertives* are seen as confident and secure. *Supportives* are encouraging and affable (Glanz, 2002).

Glanz combines these six qualities to form the following seven distinct Natural Leadership Qualities:

- *Dynamic Aggressives* are charismatic, natural leaders, goal oriented, entrepreneurial, skillful orators, diligent, politically astute, extroverted, domineering, big thinkers, intelligent, and visionary;

- *Dynamic Assertives* are change agents, personally magnetic, risk takers, independent thinkers, idealistic, introspective, spiritual illuminators, ethical illuminators, spontaneous, exciting, and powerhouses;

- *Dynamic Supportives* are charismatic, warm hearted, sincere, reliable, humorous, articulate, emotional and spiritual, easygoing, strong-willed, and gentle;

- *Adaptive Aggressives* are resourceful, socially aware, self-assured, exciting, and success-oriented;

- *Adaptive Assertives* are organized, diligent, civic and family-oriented, dependable, principled, and diligent;

- *Adaptive Supportives* are supportive of the status quo, trustworthy, charitable, good citizens, hard working, hold traditional values, and are consensus builders; and

- *Creative Assertives* are driven, self sufficient, visionary, emotional, unpredictable, absorbed, and have heightened sensitivity.

Learning to identify these qualities helps a campus leader to recognize her/his own resonance, strengths and weaknesses and also those same qualities in others (Glanz, 2002).

The principal must also effectively manage the needs of one with the needs of many; the teacher as a teacher, with the teacher as a whole person; teacher growth with student growth; and her/his vision with the community's vision. These can be challenging tasks and there are no maps, formulas, or recipes to follow (Ripley, 1997).

One researcher defines leadership as the ability to influence others. Setting priorities is the key to effective leadership. While integrity is its most important ingredient, creating positive change is its ultimate test. Effective problem solving can be the quickest way to gain leadership. Having a positive attitude, developing the people in the organization, creating a shared vision, maintaining self discipline, and ensuring effective staff development are crucial components of effective leadership (Maxwell, 1995).

Another researcher describes leadership as a process, which is " an observable, understandable, learnable set of skills and practices…" (Kouzes, 1999 p 37). He urges leaders to find their voices through soul searching in order to become authentic leaders. Learning the discipline of innovation, through a clear mission and focusing on and continually assessing results, is a necessary tool for today's principal (Kouzes, 1999).

The role of the principal is being redefined from that of an instructional leader who focuses on teaching, to the leader who focuses on the learning of her/his professional community (DuFour, 2002). No one person has a greater impact on the school's educational program than the principal, who must be the most highly qualified person available (Jean & Evans, 1995).

In his book *Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way: How to be a More Effective Leader in Today's Schools,* Ramsey (1999. p 10) lists 30 qualities of an effective leader in today's schools. They are as follows:

- Authenticity

- Tenacity/perseverance

- Ambiguity tolerance

- Flexibility

- Commitment to excellence

- Self-confidence

- Reality based attitude

- Self-discipline

- Technological know how

- Commitment to lifelong learning

- Optimism and hope

- Philosophy of risk taking

- Planning, organizing, and prioritizing skills

- Fascination and comfort with change

- Buoyancy

- Goal-setting skills

- Decision-making and problem-solving skills

- Time management skills

- Political savvy

- Higher-level thinking skills

- Communication skills

- A professional image

- Ability to get the most out of people

- Ability to close the deal

- Commitment to ethical leadership

- Commitment to common sense and uncommon sensibility

- Willingness to be intuitive

- Good physical and mental health and a balanced life

- Genuine love and concern for kids

- Passion

Ramsey (1999) states that the greatest distinction between effective and ordinary leaders is passion, which may have to be inborn.

Courage, impartiality, empathy, judgment, enthusiasm, humility, and imagination are leadership virtues that are essential for good leadership (Glanz, 2002). Being a school leader is being of service, which involves thoughtful listening and caring for others (Heller, 2002). Leadership is dependent on the ability to love, to deeply care for others. Love is necessary in visioning, communication, team-working, empowering, mentoring, and evaluating (Hoyle, 2002).

For the experienced principal, these expectations are demanding. While all principals face the challenges of the leadership position, the principal experiencing succession finds herself/himself with additional issues. Making the transition as the new

campus leader can be exciting, exhilarating, and perhaps even disastrous. It can be motivating, enticing, and frightening (Brock & Grady, 1995).

The Succession Principal

> There is a natural unavoidable contradiction when a new principal walks into a school. On one hand, there is great expectation that the new leader will do something different, bring about change of some sort, and in general, make some kind of difference. This is true whether the former principal was viewed as extremely positive or as ineffective. People expect a newcomer to represent a new order of things. On the other hand, schools are fragile and normally very conservative organizations. 'The way we've always done things' is a pretty strong value that people seek to maintain. The new principal might be criticized for not doing enough and also doing too much at the same time. (Daresh & Playko, 1991 p 90).

The process of leadership succession generates changes that affect the whole school community. The transition begins and school dynamics change when one principal leaves and another comes. Succession principals often make three common errors by underestimating: the effect of the change on all stakeholders, the time necessary to adjust to change, and the personal costs of being the succession principal (Brock & Grady, 1995).

The new principal must find ways to make the transition process a smooth one. Taking charge of a campus means striving for success while facing tremendous pressure personally, as well as professionally. Understanding the context and factors which influence succession can assist the principal in the adaptation and progress through the stages likely to be experienced in the process (Hart & Bredeson, 1996).

Many challenges are directly related to the succession leader's predecessor (Parkay, Currie & Rhodes, 1992). Knowing specific information about the former leader can be invaluable. Reasons the former principals have left, their length of tenure, whether or not they were terminated or promoted, and perceptions of the leader by teachers and the school community will affect the acceptance of the succeeding principal (Brock & Grady, 1995). Each scenario holds its own challenges. Following in the footsteps of a popular leader may be more stressful and difficult than following one who was not so popular with the staff and community (Hart, 1991).

Succession principals come in a variety of categories. They may be insiders, or those promoted or transferred from inside the school district. They may also be outsiders hired from outside the school district. They may be first time principals or they may have served as campus leaders before. Each category brings both positive and negative ramifications and each can be used to focus on the specific effects on the succession process (LeGore & Parker, 1997).

A principal will not be aware of all the obstacles he/she will encounter (Glickman, 2002). For example, expectations of the new leader that are held by the district, staff, parents, and community may not be clear. These may or may not be expressed and often the succession leader will discover them in the transition process. With the appointment of the new campus leader may come a specific agenda of the district administration. The new principal is expected to be a part of the district leadership team and to learn which responsibilities the district will expect her/him to handle (Brock & Grady, 1995).

Pre-arrival factors are variables affecting the succession of the principal prior to the selection for placement in the position. These include the reason for the succession, the selection process, the reputation of the previous leaders, and the orientation of the new administrators in the organization (LeGore & Parker, 1997).

Staff members have numerous and conflicting expectations of the principal (Brock & Grady, 1995). A study by Fauske and Ogawa (1987) found that elementary principals in succession faced a variety of responses from teachers. The first was that of detachment, experienced as a sense of powerlessness and minimization of the importance of the succession. Teachers experienced fear and anxiety. There were also a variety of expectations ranging from qualities of the new principal to a desire for the leader's support and the ability to establish unity.

Succession principals may find that staff will wait for the new leader to 'pass the test' while purposely withholding or downplaying crucial information. If the new principal passes the test, entry into the culture and access to information will take place. However, failure on the part of the new principal will restrict access of information and denial of knowledge of the school culture, which is necessary in the legitimization of the new administration (McMillan, 1994). Such a withholding of information may affect the self-concept of the succession principal and self-assessment may be difficult as there is difficulty in obtaining important information (Hart & Bredesen, 1996).

Hart (1991, 1993) extensively studied principal succession and the process of socialization in which individuals make adjustments and adaptations based on the expectations of the group or groups to which one belongs. The succession principal

must gain the knowledge and skills necessary to take on the role. This process begins in administrative pre-service programs. Professional socialization takes place as the principal adapts to the expectations of her/his new role. Organizational socialization takes place as the new principal learns the knowledge, values, and behaviors for her/his role in the organization. Succession principals "must be integrated into existing groups, validated by social processes, and granted legitimacy by subordinates and superiors before they can have significant impacts on actions taken by others" (Hart, 1993 p. 13).

Socialization for the leader during succession is affected by the need of schools for their principals to be creative while they become integrated into the group. Much learning takes place during this time and not all of it is positive (Hart, 1933). As schools have come to be known as loosely coupled systems, the principal in succession has had great challenges in determining the organizational elements that will change, the direction of that change, and the effect of the change (Firestone, 1990). The new principal must assure that the school's culture is open to a variety of new, different, or more effective means of working with all of its stakeholders (Fairholm, 1994).

Principals in succession must also understand organizational analysis and skillfully conduct such analysis during their succession period (Hart, 1991). A study of beginning principals found four areas of difficulty: 1) serious internal problems related to discipline, communication, establishment of priorities, and principal overload; 2) external problems including image, policies, parents, district-wide coordination, and decision-making; 3) the need for emphasis on curriculum, program development and evaluation, community relations, discipline, parent issues and team building, and 4)

critical challenges in the areas of student management, personal overload, instruction and most seriously, mobilization of strong, resistant, and experienced teachers with whom the beginning principal lacked credibility (Roberts & Wright, 1992).

Measures of Effectiveness for the Succession Principal

A study of 12 new urban principals found that self-efficacy, or the judgment of one's capability to organize and perform actions necessary to reach a certain performance level, was a significant factor in the principals' interpretations of their own performances. Principals with high self-efficacy were found to be more flexible and were able to achieve goals they had established. High self-efficacy principals more readily recognized the value of collaboration as they provided leadership, were more creative and persistent, and were reasonable in goal completion. They had successful role models, reported more direct and personal communication with the superintendent and other central office personnel, and felt that the primary focus of the district was a concern for students (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996).

Those principals with low self-efficacy were less flexible and adaptable, attempted to make changes without collaboration, often felt defeated, and were less likely to generate successful solutions. They had not worked with, or established close relationships with, positive role models. These principals were not able to see a district vision or feel a part of a collaborative effort and viewed their involvement with the superintendent as impersonal and mechanical. They felt no real sense of connection with the district (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996).

Principals want to get better at what they do. Those who spend time talking with others about the future and learning new ideas seem to get more done. Hoyle (1995) suggested three keys to becoming a visionary principal able to create one's own future: 1) caring about others, 2) communicating clearly, and 3) not giving up, or finishing what was begun.

Principals desiring to become effective in the succession process must understand and apply a knowledge base regarding the phenomena of change and must understand the process of change and how they can support it (Roberts & Wright, 1992).

> Successful change requires painstakingly laying a foundation, planning in incredible detail, tediously covering and recovering all the bases, continually explaining and re-explaining, dealing with naysayers, playing politics, soothing egos, dispelling fears, cheerleading, troubleshooting, communicating, compromising, coaxing, cajoling, and ultimately, dragging a few stragglers kicking and screaming into the future. That's hard work. It's also leadership. **(**Ramsey, 1999 p 66**)**

Leaders must ask hard questions about what things in the system do and don't work and why. They lead their organization in inquiry, which can result in agreement regarding the work and their purpose (Elmore, 2002). The " new principals must build meaning, commitment, create symbols that convey the core of our values and help others achieve a shared vision. They are the guardians of the culture…(Roberts, 1992)." High expectations must be maintained while staff members have the freedom to accomplish important things in the ways that work for them.

Successful succession principals work to develop mutual expectations, trust, and respect. They spend time getting to know about the plans, visions, and expectations of all teachers and other key stakeholders. They listen to both supporters and non-

supporters.   They remember that patience is vital and that the transition to social

validation may take years to achieve (Brock & Grady, 1995).

By including staff in conversations about the visions and values of the succession

principal, a sense of belonging and inclusion may be created which can help compensate

for the feeling of isolation reported by many new campus leaders. In addition, anxiety

may be reduced allowing the new principal to be more effective. This may also improve

the principal's abilities to predict the response of others to commonplace events in the

school and thereby generate reliability and trust among the staff. By establishing that

"she has had common experiences, possesses critical and valued skills, and shares values

and beliefs that drive the actions of others in the school, she contributes to the trust

necessary for healthy interaction" (Hart & Bredeson, 1996 p.189).

"Organizations undergoing change bulge with rumors. Sometimes bosses…try to

shade the truth. Often it's because they don't know the truth…are confused themselves.

Nonetheless…the best way (the only sure way to make allies of people who are scared to

death (all people confronted with significant change) is to tell the truth…" (Peters, 1999

p. 468).

The following recommendations are viewed as critical to the succession principal

who strives to be successful (Hall & Mani, 1992):

- Do your homework—learn all you can about the school before you go

- Set expectations---the principal's values and priorities become those of the

  school

- Plan—think ahead—be reflective

- Be sensitive to consequences and implications before acting and reversing priority decisions

- Staff development must be relevant and ongoing

- Build culture---examine interpretations that staff and community may have

- Make personnel decisions wisely

- Be visible

- Be aware of the politics of the position

- Set academic goals

- Focus on the students

- Maintain discipline

Principals in succession found several keys for making the succession process a successful one (Hall & Mani, 1992):

- Development of a positive school climate

- Placement of a strong emphasis on academics from the start

- Development of priorities and strategies before the return of staff

- Commitment to continuity

- Use of key themes and phrases as a framework of interpretation of values of the new leader

- Provision of induction programs by the district

Daresh & Playko (1997) offered the following advice for the succession principal:

- Learn what the staff expected of the last principal.

- Learn what expectations the staff has of the succeeding principal.

- Keep in mind that there will be several difficult transition months in which the staff must recognize that the former principal is gone and along with her/him the old image of how the principal supports the staff.

- Recognize that change is often needed and that the new principal is generally there to foster that change.

- Look for key cultural signs in the environment and appreciate the personalities and profiles that exist.

- Learn to identify the informal organization; those people and things without formal titles but with influence on the daily school activities.

- Listen to the language and sounds of the school; the way teachers describe students; the philosophy that is voiced; the tone of the language used both among staff and with those from outside the school; the degree of formality used in conversation of the staff with each other and the new principal; sounds of students and teachers coming out of the classrooms.

- Give honor to the past by celebrating its successes.

- Build a strong support system within and outside of the school.

"The pathway to career advancement and success of school administrators is littered with obstacles and potholes…if the attributes of success in a prior position are to transfer into success in a new leader position, they must be done so in concert with five elements of leadership behavior," (Davis, 1998 p.49).

These five predictors of leadership success are: 1) a genuine sensitivity to the needs of others and strong interpersonal and communication skills, 2) adaptability, 3) the application of situational leadership, 4) an internal locus of control, and 5) intelligence, enthusiasm, and balance (Davis, 1998).

While test scores should not be the only critical area of performance in which the succession principal will be measured, it is realized that the incumbent principal has great influence on the effectiveness of instruction in the school and therefore on the gains or losses on criterion measures (Ogawa & Hart, 1985). Principals have both direct and indirect influence on student learning. Those who implement balance and congruence as they strive to manage their responsibilities in the succession process with instructional leadership behaviors, beliefs about student learning and high expectations for continuous growth and improvement, create a compelling instructional leadership tactic (Hart & Bredeson, 1996).

Principals who are effective in the succession process are risk takers. They know their values and priorities. They have excellent human relations skills. They understand their task orientation and have managed personal issues. They are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. They are seen as visionary leaders. Most importantly, they believe in themselves. They are themselves and both recognize and capitalize on their uniqueness as leaders (Brock & Grady, 1995).

Support for Succession Principals

A study of 12 principals in their beginning year found that they received support from a variety of sources. They received support from the district in the form of reassurance of their professional competence and technical assistance regarding budget, facilities, scheduling, purchasing, and legal issues. Peer support came in both formal and informal means and was considered very significant. Faculty and staff support was dependent on the willingness of the new principal to share information, to include others in decision making, to utilize staff expertise, and to listen. Support from the administrative team was viewed as positive by most of the principals. Parent support must be developed, but principals still found that strong parent support was invaluable. Support from the principals' families varied in degree and ranged from emotional support to encouragement in thinking through issues. Community support was viewed as extremely important but only occasionally supportive. Student support was not seen as significant and was infrequently mentioned (Parkay & Currie, 1992).

These principals had to learn to cope with very little help. The researchers recommended a tripod model of support, which included training in the areas of identification of technical expertise such as budget, scheduling, planning, legal issues, and staffing issues. Networking opportunities included participation in a Principal's Academy, principal support groups, and use of electronic bulletin boards. Coaching for the principals included the use of mentors (retired and existing principals), training of district supervisory personnel in ways to provide support to new campus principals, and strong peer relationships (Parkay & Currie, 1992).

Another study of 12 new urban principals found differences in the perceptions of support between those identified as high self-efficacy leaders and those identified as low self-efficacy leaders. Principals with high self-efficacy obtained support from a number of sources: the superintendent, district staff, parents, teachers, administration and the teacher organization chairperson. They also named colleagues, predecessors, friends, and family. Feeling supported reduced the feelings of isolation and loneliness, encouraged risk taking, and increased confidence (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996).

Principals with low self-efficacy found fewer sources of support and more obstacles. They perceived their professional colleagues at all levels to be unsupportive or even bureaucratic obstacles. They felt isolated in their schools and within the district (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996).

The demands of the succession experience require support in a variety of forms. A study of 158 urban principals, 74 % of whom were elementary principals (Osterman, Crow & Rosen, 1997), found that comprehensive professional development, collegial networking opportunities, mentoring by experienced peers, and specialized training in transformational leadership were viewed as key sources of support. While principals felt that the district superintendent should be a main source of support, it was found that in reality, only moderate assistance was provided relative to specific task areas. The district was viewed as a bureaucracy that created obstacles to their success, including autonomy. Most of the principals felt that the superintendent "expected managerial competence and compliance and was not interested in transformative or collaborative leadership," (Osterman et al., 1997 p. 391).

The principal in the succession process needs to find a mentor or mentors (Daresh & Playko, 1997, Hart & Bredeson, 1996, Hart, 1993), develop or add to a strong support network, participate in professional organizations, and maintain one's personal and family support (Daresh & Playko, 1997). The effective succession of the principal is crucial to sustained improvement in the school. This is more likely if there are leaders at many levels in the organization who are nurtured, cultivated, and sustained (Fullan, 2002).

While there is substantial research addressing the benefits of the assignment of a mentor principal to first time principals, the need for mentors for succession principals must not be overlooked. Careful attention should be made in assigning mentors who will insure positive relationships that support the effective socialization process of the succession principals (Hart, 1993). Having a mentor can lessen anxiety and provide easy access to important information early in the succession experience (Hart & Bredeson, 1996).

Roberts & Wright (1992) believed the following three propositions were crucial in the provision of support for the new campus leader:

1. Increasing understanding of complexities and challenges of the change process;

2. Studying the principalship should include working with experienced, successful principals in guided field experiences; and

3. Ongoing mentor relationships.

A recommendation by Erlandson (1994) that all principals, whether beginning or experienced, should be provided with collegial support networks, is certainly applicable to the succession principal. The principal going through the succession process needs the ability to reflect with others who are undertaking the same process as they serve to legitimize experiences and provide sympathetic ears when problems arise. This allows for these principals to form their own informal groups based on common understanding, which can prove to be invaluable to leaders who experience their own unique sense of isolation (McMillan, 1994).

Succession principals must know both the formal and informal expectations of their role. They must have feedback that enhances their ability to be successful in their roles. They must be provided by the district administration "the authority, autonomy, and resources necessary to exercise leadership" (Osterman et al., 1997, p. 391). Supervisors must make the new principal aware of the socialization stages they will experience--survival, control, stability, educational leadership, and professional actualization--and support them through those stages (Parkay et al., 1992).

Succession principals will encounter many obstacles as they enter their new roles, yet they can develop their own strategies for managing these obstacles as district support may or may not be perceived as effective (Osterman & Sullivan, 1994). Bringing together people from various backgrounds to work together to get results and serve as a sounding board for new ideas for a common purpose helps generate the courage to make necessary changes (Bennis, 1999).

The support of peers provides support in the succession process. This may be through members of the administrative team, key staff, professional colleagues, support staff, insiders, or other key stake-holders who are willing to share the vision of the succession principal and share views of the school prior to the change in leadership (Hart & Bredeson, 1996). The support of an assistant principal is crucial to the success of the new principal, but should not be taken for granted. If the assistant applied for the principalship, there may be tension. Yet this may be the greatest source of information about the campus. Three additional key people crucial to the succession principal are the secretary, cafeteria manager, and the head custodian. Not only do they supervise the majority of non-instructional staff, but they also have almost daily contact with students and staff and can do much to support a positive image to the school community (Holman, 1996).

"Principals are capable of having a substantial impact on schools" (Leithwood, Steinbach, Begley, 1992). The research presented in this chapter describes the role expectations of the principalship, the unique situations encountered by the succession principal, measures of effectiveness of the succession principal, as well as the need for and examples of support for the succession principal.

As the numbers of succession principals continue to be on the rise, understanding these concepts and seeking ways to make the succession process a successful one is even more crucial. This research was conducted for this purpose.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter reviews the purpose and focus of this study as well as the research questions. Also described in this chapter are the population used in the study, the procedures used in the study, the method of data collection, and method of data analysis.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of elementary principals in the Austin Independent School District who succeeded other principals in 1998 or 1999. Issues addressed included the principals' perceptions of the experiences themselves and impact of the experience on effectiveness (what they were able to accomplish according to their personal standards and goals and varying forms of documentation). The information learned was used to offer recommendations that may better serve principals who step into the succession role in the Austin Independent School District.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What has been the experience of a selected group of principals who recently succeeded another principal?

- What impact has this experience had upon their effectiveness as principals?

- How can the succession process be improved to better facilitate principal succession?

Population

While a total of seventy principals were named to succeed other principals at elementary and secondary campuses across the district, the researcher, also an elementary principal, chose to focus on those at the elementary level. Twenty-three elementary principals who succeeded into their principalship roles in 1998 or 1999, were still principals in those same schools in 2001-2002. Fourteen responded to the questionnaire and agreed to participate in this study. There were ten Anglo females. Four males responded: one African American, one Hispanic, and two Anglo. The years of experience as principals ranged from three to twenty years. Nine of the respondents had campus or Central Office administration experience both in and out of the Austin Independent School District, while the remaining five respondents' administrative experience was limited to AISD.

Based on their responses given and with attention to gender, ethnicity, and experience, eight principals were selected to participate in two focus groups. Four females and four males participated in the focus groups. Three principals who responded to the questionnaires and participated in a focus group were selected as case studies. These three participants were selected based on their responses to both the

written questionnaires and their input in the focus groups, as well as with attention to gender, ethnicity and experience. This group included one female and two males.

Procedures

After obtaining permission from the superintendent's designee to conduct this research in the district, 23 principals who succeeded into an elementary principalship in 1998 or 1999, and were still principals in those schools in 2001-2002, were identified. Following a face-to-face conversation with each identified principal, the principal was mailed a consent-to-participate form. Each was asked to respond in writing to the following:

- Briefly describe your educational background experiences before assuming your current administrative role.

- Describe, in as much detail as possible, one of your most positive experiences during your succession year.

- Describe, in as much detail as possible, one of your most negative experiences during your succession year.

The original signed consent forms of the 14 respondents are kept under lock and key at the home of the researcher. Each participant was provided with a copy of her/his signed consent form.

Major themes emerging from the written responses regarding positive experiences were school staff relations and parent relations. Major themes emerging

from those responses regarding negative experiences were also school staff relations, parent relations, and lack of support from Central Office.

Responses were reviewed and a more narrow, purposive sampling of eight principals were invited to participate in a focus group to discuss their succession experiences. Attention to ethnicity, gender, and educational experiences in and out of the district was given. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary. Eight principals, four females and four males, participated in the focus groups.

Specific questions were formulated for the focus group discussions. Dialogue in the focus groups was guided by a set of basic questions and issues to be explored and were based on written responses as well as the review of the literature and interest of the researcher. The general questions addressed in the focus groups were:

- What processes did you initiate that facilitated your success as a principal?

- What processes did others initiate that facilitated your success as a principal?

- What processes did you initiate that harmed your success as a principal?

- What processes did others initiate that harmed your success as a principal?

- What would you change about the timing of your processes?

- What information did you received that facilitated your success?

- What information did you wish that you had received?

- What helped you the most during your first year?

- What hindered you the most during your first year?

Rather than being predetermined, the exact wording and order of the questions were a result of the dialogue, which allowed for conversation with questions emerging

throughout the discussion. One focus group was conducted on the campus of a participant and the other at my campus. During the taped focus group sessions, open-ended questions were utilized. Following the focus group discussion, a written draft of the findings was prepared. At this point, additional questions not yet answered were identified.

Following the focus group sessions, a smaller purposive sampling of three participants to serve as case studies was selected. This sampling was made as result of written responses, observations made during the focus group sessions, and the responses given by the participants. It was my desire to take a further look at three critical areas that had been identified as challenges by the questionnaires and focus groups: community, staff, and district support. The three principals selected were believed to be those who could most effectively address those issues based on their experiences. Those identified were one Anglo female, one African American male, and one Hispanic male. A two-hour interview was conducted with each participant. The interviews and responses to identified questions were recorded. These interviews were conducted at the participants' schools. Guiding questions for these interviews were:

- How did your experience in your succession year impact your perception of your performance as a principal?

- What data have you utilized to determine your effectiveness as a succession principal and what does that data tell you?

- What support systems were in place that helped or hindered your succession experience?

- What advice would you give to a succession principal facing similar situations?

Additional questions that emerged during the interviews included:

- How did your succession experience affect you as a person?

- How did your experience affect your relationships with your peers?

- What did you learn about yourself and the district from your experience?

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded. Names of the participants were not divulged. Information was reviewed using member checks with the participants (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Additional communication took place via face-to-face meetings and phone calls. For credibility, following the interviews, a group portrait of the case studies, as well as a group portrait of the focus groups was prepared and circulated among members of the focus group for their comments and critique. The final report was then written.

Data Analysis

Methods of data collection were the use of the written responses, the semi-structured focus groups, and the more specific questions utilized in the case studies. Qualitative descriptive data retrieved from written responses and interactive interviews were analyzed and interpreted according to the principals outlined in *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods* (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Construction of a process to compare emerging themes was identified in order to determine succession experiences, principal effectiveness during succession, and possible improvements to the succession process.

Following the first tape-recorded session, I transcribed the recordings. During this time, I reflected on the experiences asking myself questions such as:

- What have I learned from this experience?

- What additional questions do I want to have answered?

- What changes should be made with the second focus group?

- How can I be even more effective in data collection?

Responses to these questions aided in formulating the format for the second focus group.

I also tape recorded the second group and transcribed the recordings. During this process some of the same questions asked before were asked again: "What have I learned from this experience?" and "What additional questions do I want to have answered?"

The transcribed responses were unitized by placing smaller bits of stand-alone data on individual 3"x5" index cards. I then categorized and re-categorized these individual cards looking for emergent categories of information. I found this process to be one that provided me with the opportunity to discover emerging themes in the data. Peer reviewers were also utilized to support me in both the emergent category dissemination and negative case analysis allowing the researcher to review thick descriptions. This technique also allowed me to identify those pieces of unitized data that would support in the process of bridging, extending, and surfacing as described by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993).

Written responses were reviewed and topically coded. Several categories were found to be consistent. The triangulation process was used to code and categorize the transcribed focus group conversations. Reflexive journal entries, member checks, and peer debriefing were also critical throughout the study for ensuring trustworthiness (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I also asked, "Who could best answer those questions and how could that data be collected most effectively?" Following an intense review of the categories and remaining questions that had emerged, I proceeded with case studies of three participants who I believed could best answer those remaining questions. These interviews were transcribed, coded, and triangulated as well. Member checks and peer debriefing were also utilized. Redefining and refining the methodology took place as necessary as a result of the data collection process (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Chapter IV contains the data analysis of the written responses and focus groups.

Chapter V contains the data analysis of each case study. Each study contains an introduction, which includes a description of the participant and his/her school, followed by the participant's story and her/his perceptions regarding the succession experience. Also included is reflection on the findings of each study.

Chapter VI reports the overall findings of the study.

Chapter VII is the concluding chapter of the study. It contains a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and further study. The recommendations are based on the literature review, as well as findings from written responses, focus groups, and case studies.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRES AND FOCUS GROUPS

To begin this research project, I made contact with the human resources department of the Austin Independent School District and I obtained a list of those elementary principals who had succeeded into a principalship in 1998 or 1999. I then determined which of those principals were in the same schools in the 2001-2002 school year, using the AISD staff directory, and confirmed my list with Human Resources.

Questionnaires

I then personally contacted the 23 principals who fit into that category, advised them of the purpose of my study and asked them to participate. Each of the 23 principals was mailed a questionnaire and an agreement to participate form. Each principal was asked to respond to the following:

- Briefly describe your educational background experiences before assuming your current administrative role.

- Describe, in as much detail as possible, one of your most positive experiences during your succession year.

- Describe, in as much detail as possible, one of your most negative experiences during your succession year.

A total of 14 questionnaires and participation forms were returned by mail, fax or hand delivered directly to me. Ten women and four men responded to the questionnaires

and agreed to participate in the study. Nine of those responding had been principals

prior to their current positions, while the remaining five were in their first principalships.

As the responses were received and read, the responses to each question were duplicated

and placed into categories, and themes were determined. As the written responses to the

preliminary questionnaires began to be returned, I noticed that the themes of the

responses were emerging.

Positive experiences were related most often to experiences with staff. Cited were

examples of helpful office staff, the positive relationships with new teachers hired, and

support for changes from veteran principals. Positive experiences with parents were the

second most cited, and were noted as support from parents, the Parent Teacher

Association, and parents' willingness to support changes being brought by the

succession principal.

However, other responses in this category included conversations with the principal

being succeeded and the move of a principal from secondary to elementary

administration. One principal even shared that a positive experience was difficult to

remember.

Negative experiences were also most often those relating to relationships with staff.

They included such examples as: teachers who were resistant to changes that were

implemented; outward signs of distrust and defiance of staff; anonymous "contempt

mail" being left for the new principal; staff who refused to acknowledge the succession

principal as the campus leader; staff members encouraging the intervention of a local

teacher organization; and assistant principals who attempted to undermine the position of the succession principals.

The second most common negative theme related to parents and included the following examples: a lack of parent awareness of school programs and student needs, parent opposition to having the new principal who was named, and a small group of parents who met every weekend to attempt to find ways to get rid of the new principal.

Also mentioned in this category was a lack of support from the Central Office concerning a major health issue in a school.

Findings

In reviewing the responses, I found that the major emerging themes in the positive experience category were:

- School Staff Relations
- Parent Relations

I also believed that the principal who could not find a positive experience to share was making a significant statement as well.

Emerging themes of negative experiences were:

- School Staff Relations
- Parent Relations
- Lack of Support From the Central Office

Focus Groups

In order to gain further insight into the succession experiences of elementary principals in AISD, eight of the responding principals were invited to attend one of two focus group sessions. Five participated in the first group and three in the second. The participants were selected based on their responses as well as consideration of which respondents could give the greatest insights for my research. I was also conscious of gender, ethnicity, and administrative experience.

Focus Group One

The first session was held on a warm spring morning in the school library of one of the respondents. Golden rays of morning sun poured through the rows of windows that encircled the room and fell gently across the sitting area of the library.

With five principals, one observer, and myself present, the group moved to the seating area and nestled in for the session. The members of this focus group included three women and two men. I began with an expression of thanks for the willingness of those present to participate at this level in the research project and gave them a brief review of the themes of the written responses to the original questionnaire.

The participants were asked to share any processes they utilized in their succession year that helped to facilitate their effectiveness. One principal stated that it was very important for him to honor those persons who had come before him as campus leaders. "Include them in ceremonies. There is no need to be condescending. Don't accept what

others tell you about your predecessor." He also stated, "The first two months of your principalship will follow you for the rest of your term."

Another principal stated that it is important to be yourself, be a good listener, and know who the leaders on the campus are. Another principal stated that caring was the key; caring about staff, students, and the community. Still another participant stated that it was important to change things only when the time was right.

One of the participants in this group was the principal who had initially responded that there was nothing positive that she could remember about her succession experience because her negative experience had been so overwhelming. I asked her if there was something now that she could recall that she would consider a positive memory. "I think it was the community spirit of teachers and parents working together under very difficult circumstances. The parents were great and I always felt like I could count on them for support for the school."

When asked about what processes others had put in place that supported the principals in their effectiveness during their successions, several responded that the support of their peers really made a difference in their effectiveness. "Coaching really helped me make that transition from an assistant to a principal. I had a wonderful mentor principal I had worked with in another district."

One participant spoke of a very supportive group of peer principals who met regularly and had speakers from different divisions in the district. "Having lunch meetings with five or six sister school principals monthly was time I wouldn't take anything for. We gave each other such support."

Monthly Area Meetings with vertical team principals were mentioned frequently as support systems that had been put in place by the Area Superintendents. Also, being assigned a mentor who was assigned specifically to each succession principal was found to support effectiveness.

One of the questions I wanted to address dealt with processes the succession principals had put in to place that hindered their effectiveness. The answers were as varied as the participants present. One shared trying to implement a dress code for staff that caused friction right away between her and the staff. "It turned into a Godzilla. I never realized how much that one issue would interfere in my relationships with people. It took a long time to overcome that barrier."

Another principal shared that just not knowing whom to trust and sometimes trying to deal with things alone made things more difficult for her. Failed attempts to establish strong working relationships with existing assistant principals had hindered several members of the group. "I often felt like everything I tried to do or put into place was undermined. Even though I brought in my Area Superintendent to address the issue, my relationship with my assistant was never what it should have been and I believe my school suffered as a result."

The principal with a school health-care problem shared her experience with the group.

> Parents kept coming in and asking what was wrong. Children were
> sick. The day the peer review data came back I kept saying to Central
> that I did not think the results were going to be good. Texas Tech did
> a peer review of the data and it was already so horrible that an
> engineer, a PhD. chemist, was hoping to name a microorganism after
> his discovery. He told us that we had the worst air that they had ever

> tested. Until this point, only my Area Superintendent had believed us. His was the only support we had received. I sat down and showed him what would happen if we remained in the air space. He spent the weekend looking at what could be done and told me that he would not let us stay in this building. The whole first year is colored because of the mold and construction nightmare. It was like running a disaster zone. Navigating the Central Office is the pits.

When asked what processes others had put into place that might have hindered their effectiveness, several principals referenced systems left in place by former principals. Examples shared were performance appraisals that did not accurately reflect the teacher's performance; teachers who had been passed from one school to the next without appropriate appraisals; leaders who had operated using fear and caused staff to distrust new leadership; the bureaucracy faced in dealing with departments at Central Office; staffs left divided with their loyalties; the assignment by Central Office of interim administrators; a lack of support from the district related to dealing with difficult personnel issues; and not knowing how to negotiate the central office.

I wanted to know if there were any changes these principals would have made in their timing of initiating changes on their campuses. One participant said she would definitely not have tackled the dress code issue so quickly. Another said that she would have asked more questions of her Area Superintendent regarding Central Office procedures. Another would have given more time to the selection of some staff members. One principal said he would not have waited as long as he had to make some staffing changes that were in the best interest of the children.

One participant stated that she would have liked to have been more informed about what had happened on her campus the year before she was named as principal. "I got no

information from the Central Office, but I walked into a situation with staff that was out of control. It still is out of control and I felt like I was totally blind sided."

I also wanted to know what information these principals had received that they felt supported their effectiveness in succession. One participant shared something that her Area Superintendent told a group of principals as they walked down the hallway of a school. The new principal was about to remove some frames on pictures in the hallway. The Area Superintendent cautioned her, "Don't touch them without knowing who put them up there and why. They could be a part of the school's culture and you need to wait five years before you change some things."

"My Area Superintendent told me he believed in me, even when I questioned if he had made the right decision in hiring me. I was having some very difficult times, almost ready to walk away, and I really needed to hear that from him" shared one group member.

"My Area Superintendent was the only person in the district who I felt was fighting for me when our campus was experiencing a crisis that was affecting staff, students, and parents," commented a principal passionate about her school. "He told me he would make sure that we were taken care of and he did that. But where was the rest of Central Office?"

Another told of advice from her mentor to be visible and to spend time building relationships with the parents and staff. "Having my peers tell me that they were there for me was so helpful," commented another member of the group.

"I just wish we had more time to be together to talk and share what is going on with each other," stated one group member.

Another principal added, "Well, I would like to see important changes in the district announced more timely and more humanely. We have just seen 12 schools immediately uprooted---people's lives turned upside down for a vision that is unclear, for a purpose that is unclear, just for a need to do something." (This participant was referring to a drastic plan put into place abruptly to address concerns regarding low performing campuses.)

At this time, the conversation shifted to a different focus, but I felt it was important that the group members be able to express themselves regarding their concerns. It was obvious that each person present had something to share. Issues addressed included:

- Lack of time for succession principals to meet and share common issues
- Lack of time for dialogue and reflection among principals in administrative meetings
- Passing teachers from one campus to another who are less than adequate in performance
- Uncertainty in navigating and negotiating the Central Office environment
- Getting timely answers from questions to various departments at the Central Office
- Adding all of the district initiatives into already full schedules and lack of dialogue with those expected to implement changes on their campuses before decisions are made

- Lack of prioritization of district initiatives and mandates

- Fear of speaking the truth and ramifications of doing so

- Lack of clear role definitions and expectations

- Budgeting issues that plague new and existing principals

While each of these issues was not fully discussed in the focus group, the group felt it was important to share them with the Area Superintendents and perhaps they could be addressed in Vertical Team Meetings.

When asked what advice members of this group would share with succession principals, the following were shared:

- Get a good mentor and communicate with her/him regularly.

- Get to know your staff and your parents right away.

- Do a lot of listening.

- Find out who's who at Central and know who to call for what purpose.

- Be prepared to spend long hours at work.

- Be yourself.

- Don't be afraid to ask questions.

- Collaborate with others regarding major decisions on your campus.

- Learn who you can trust and trust them.

- Build a strong relationship with your assistant principal.

- Evaluate staff appropriately.

- Learn to prioritize.

- Treat people fairly.

- Get a handle on budget and textbooks early.

- Honor the work done before you.

- Know the sacred cows of your school culture.

Focus Group Two

The second group met a week later in my office on a warm spring afternoon. Three principals, one female and two males, and I gathered around a table while an observer stationed herself at my desk. I began by thanking the participants, reviewing with them the responses from the questionnaires, and encouraging them to share their thoughts openly.

We first discussed systems that the principals or others had initiated that supported their effectiveness during their succession experiences. One principal shared that he inherited a situation where few systems were in place to support student and staff success. He put in numerous hours of extensive work to create and put systems in place. The establishment of procedures for communication, textbooks, Bilingual and Special Education, scheduling, keys, safety drills, monitoring implementation of the TEKS, and monitoring TAAS was critical. "It took a lot of time but it was worth it. Everything is just perfect and the next principal to take over the school will have everything in place."

A second principal also shared that when he arrived at his campus there were no systems in place for budget, communication, discipline, instructional programs, data analysis, or textbooks. " I met with Central Office staff members and campus staff to

collaboratively design programs that would improve the overall operation of the school," he stated.

Another shared that being at school from 5:30 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. allowed her the opportunity to work on getting things in place and keep communication going on a regular basis. Establishment of systems, for her, was an ongoing process.

All three shared that the ongoing communication with their Area Superintendent had been most valuable and that the monthly area and vertical team meetings greatly contributed to their effectiveness because of the information received and the opportunities to dialogue with their peers.

In response to what had been initiated by others that had supported their effectiveness, one principal quickly shared that her experience of finding systems in place had been somewhat different from the other two members of the group. As she had been the assistant principal at her campus before becoming principal, she had put several of the existing systems into place herself. Procedures for textbooks, communication, Limited English Proficient (LEP), and equipment organization were established. Moving into the principalship, knowing the systems she had previously created, was beneficial.

I asked the group if any procedures put into place by them or by others had a negative impact on their effectiveness. One principal shared that the process of raising the bar in the area of academic expectations for students and professional expectations of staff was not easy for most of his staff. "Unfortunately this led to three grievances with three different staff members. The amount of time that I invested in these grievances, I

admit, absorbed my professional life and minimized opportunities to be in classrooms with students."

One participant shared that straightening out the budget situation left by the former principal had been a monumental task. In fact, it took her two years to fully understand the bookkeeping process.

Another issue for a principal was the manner in which a former principal had managed from a top down position, rather than a collaborative one. It had taken some time for her to recover with a staff that wondered if she was always going to be looking over their shoulders.

One member of the group shared the following:

> The many challenges associated with my first year as the principal
> stemmed from the lack of leadership from the previous two
> principals. They were, for the most part, hands off leaders, and did
> not implement district initiatives; they allowed the teachers to do
> whatever they pleased, even if things done were not in the best
> interest of the children. For this reason, many staff members were
> challenged with the accountability standards and change in
> instructional programs when I came in.

Another member of the group shared that "I still have to remind myself to differentiate between when I need to collaborate and when I don't." He then went on to tell us about an incident in which he felt he should have collaborated with staff, but did not. He had been very insistent about putting a system into place that would summarize students' academic strengths and weaknesses. He told the staff that they would have to write a narrative on each student, gave them a criteria chart, and told them they had one month to complete the charts---it was non-negotiable. "There was so much hidden

resentment over this that I did not find out about until later. They all got it done, but the quality I wanted was not there and the work did not represent what I had really wanted."

When asked if the principals would have changed anything about the timing of implementation of processes on their campuses, one principal shared that if it were possible to relive his first year, he would definitely do more listening to concerns and develop a system for listening to them, minimize major changes at the onset, and spend more time developing relationships.

Another shared that she had tried to take on too much too soon and brought in too many new things too fast. "My teachers got it done, but at the end of that year asked me to slow down and not try anything else new for a while." She also stated that learning which staff members could really be trusted was an important lesson to which she should have paid more attention.

The next topic of discussion was information that the principals received during their succession that supported their effectiveness, or information they wish they had received. One group member who became a principal in the 1998-1999 school year shared the disappointment felt because no real valuable information was presented at the meetings for new principals that year. There were more unanswered questions than answered and time spent at the one-hour monthly meetings was viewed as wasted.

A second group member stated that attendance at new principals' meetings the following year had changed and that they were more helpful because a variety of people from the district came and shared information on topics such as the guidance program, campus security, and curriculum.

The third principal, also assigned in the 1998-2000 year, felt that the district had made more effort to support first year principals and that the topics he most recalled were budget, maintenance, special programs, and guidance and counseling. He also was forced to learn a great deal about the district's grievance process and legal statutes associated with personnel issues.

One member of the group also had the opportunity to meet with the former principal who shared important information about staff, including whom to trust, which was found to be helpful during that year.

There was information that the principals wished they had received earlier on in their succession experiences. Some were minor, such as utilizing the office phone system, knowing that they could get offices repainted, or knowing how to replace furniture at a fraction of the cost. Others mentioned were more significant and included: understanding the budget process, knowing who would and would not support the new principal, knowing more about the grievance process, knowing more about the staff's relationships with former principals, and knowing how to best handle difficult situations with parents who openly protested the arrival of the new principal.

I asked the group if there was anything that had helped or hindered them the most during their succession experiences. One of the group shared that attending state and national conferences, visiting with principal colleagues, reading educational journals, and visiting other campuses had made him a better principal.

Another shared, "My relationship with co-principals. I rarely call downtown to ask anything. I called my peers to get an opinion about how they would handle something."

All members of the group agreed that the monthly meetings they attended with the other principals in their district-designated areas were some of the most valuable opportunities they had, not only during their succession year, but even now. These meetings allowed them the opportunity to learn from each other and to have rich dialogues with their peers that were not a part of other meetings they attended.

Also discussed were the relationships with assistant principals. One person in the group found the first year to be especially challenging because the assistant principal had applied for the principalship as well. She remained on the campus and was not the partner the new principal needed during that time. Her lack of complete cooperativeness, along with other challenges faced by the principal, made this a difficult relationship to change.

One principal shared that the assistant principal was hired based on a recommendation from the Central Office and that it had been a very challenging situation because she did not have some of the skills needed to take on that responsibility at the time.

We also discussed mentors. One principal was never assigned a mentor and felt that he had to rely on himself, which as a first year principal was difficult. Another had a mentor who was a high school principal who sent lots of positive notes, but was not what she had counted on from a mentor. "Maybe I just didn't know the right questions to ask—but I found myself just having to dive in and start swimming. By the second year, you are considered experienced and don't get that mentor support. So I have learned as much from my peers as anyone."

Another principal shared that while he did not consider himself to be an experienced principal after one year, he realized that that was the thinking of the district and that what initial district support was there initially, goes away, leaving principals to sink or swim.

"It is the same thing as the teacher's induction year. If you look at all of the research, it takes three to five years to get really good at anything. I think that's true of me as a principal. But by the second year, there wasn't a mentor principal. I don't think people take that into consideration and you lose principals. We lose good people because of this," shared a participant.

So what advice would this group of principals share with other succession principals? The following is a list of those things presented:

- Take care of yourself, your health, and your family.

- Know the grievance process.

- Learn about legal statutes related to personnel issues.

- Develop systems that are lacking on your campus.

- Find someone you admire. Spend time with them away from your campus regularly.

- Ask questions.

- Build relationships on and off your campus.

- Hire wisely.

- Don't try to change too much your first year, but do change what you need to change.

- Take a good look at what is working on your campus.

- Find someone you can count on.

- Pick your battles.

- Never underestimate the significance of your relationship with your assistant

  principal.

Learnings From the Focus Groups

The ability to hear a group of peers talk about their succession experiences was very rewarding. The participants were provided with the opportunity to share times of joy and times of pain in a safe space. I noticed the eagerness that principals had to share their stories, as if they just wanted to be heard and have their experiences validated by others. Members of the groups quickly began to see that their experiences were not isolated and that what they had gone through in their succession year was often similar to others in the group.

I did hear laughter, but I also heard sadness in the stories of the participants. It was clear that positive experiences with staff members and parents were important. However, I was surprised that the majority of the conversations revolved around the negative experiences with staff, parents, and Central Office. It seemed as each participant had spent more time and energy on those issues than any others.

Another significant point that came from these groups is that even three or four years later, strained and challenging relationships with Central Office permeate the group and the members' abilities to be as effective as they would like to be. In times of

great challenge, these principals were still struggling to experience the positive

supportive relationships they so longed to have.

CHAPTER V

CASE STUDIES

This chapter contains the three case studies selected. Following a review of the written responses to questionnaires and focus group meetings, I determined that three individuals clearly stood out and would be the ideal selections for further one-to-one interviews. I contacted each of these principals and asked them to allow me to do further research with them individually. Each one agreed to participate.

Prior to these interviews, I thoroughly grounded myself on the schools' demographic data and the performance according to the AEIS indicators as well as parent and student surveys and administrative appraisals.

The following questions guided these interviews:

- How did your experience in your succession year impact your perception of your performance as a principal?

- What data have you utilized to determine your effectiveness as a succession principal and what does that data tell you?

- What support systems were in place that helped or hindered your succession experience?

- What advice would you give to a succession principal facing similar situations?

Additional questions that emerged during the interviews included:

- How did your succession experience affect you as a person?

- How did your experience affect your relationships with your peers?

- What did you learn about yourself and the district from your experience?

- What systems were in place that helped or hindered your effectiveness?

Each study includes an introduction, the participant's story, and findings.

Steven

Introduction

Steven is an African American male in his late thirties. He joined the field of education 10 years ago after a career of management in the business world. He was accepted into an alternative teacher education program and after three years as a middle school math teacher, Steven was one of five AISD teachers selected from over 100 applicants to participate in a principal preparation program. During this program he also served as an administrative intern to an Area Superintendent and later as a high school assistant principal.

Steven is a charming fellow with a wonderful sense of humor and a strong constitution. He is compassionate about students and their learning as well as teachers and their learning. In addition to his busy schedule as an elementary school principal, Steven also serves his local administrative organization as a member of the Consultation Team that regularly meets with the superintendent.

Edison Elementary School is located in northeast Austin and serves approximately 600 students, 50% of whom are African American and 50% are Hispanic. Ninety percent of the students at Edison qualify for the free and reduced lunch program.

Edison has a rich history that goes back to the late 1800's when the original campus was on the site of the current Disch-Falk Field at the University of Texas. The campus was rebuilt on its current location in the early 1970's.

In March of 1999, early in the principal announcement process, Steven was appointed as the principal of Edison and was to begin his new position in the fall of the 1999-2000 school year. He was serving, at that time, as a high school assistant principal and had been named as the summer school principal for that same high school when he received his appointment. But what should have been an exciting event for anyone about to be appointed by the School Board was soon very clouded.

Steven's Story

"I was having dinner with a friend when the Area Superintendent called me on my cell phone and asked me to step outside the restaurant and talk to him. He told me that there had been discussion regarding my appointment in the closed session of the Board Meeting. I had no clue that there had been any opposition or problems with my appointment. I did not know what had transpired. I just knew that he was worried. And my heart sank." So Steven left the restaurant and went home to watch the televised School Board meeting.

> When a name is taken to the Board it is generally assumed that the
> appointment will be made and I wondered if the discussion meant that
> they were going to pull my appointment. I also realized that at the time,
> there was an in interim superintendent and the person really making the
> decision administratively was a strong supporter, so I tried not to get
> discouraged. Others being appointed that night were done so
> unanimously. Then it came to my appointment and the Board member
> who represents my area of the district said that she was abstaining

because she wasn't sure if I could deal with the parents in that community. Two board members just voted "no" and one was absent so it was a five, two, one vote. I was shocked. How many people have people voting against them?

The day after the Board appointment, the Area Superintendent for Edison Elementary asked Steven to meet him at the school. Steven felt that the Area Superintendent, who had been an integral part of the interview process, was no longer excited about his appointment to Edison. "I think it was because of the opposition. He just wasn't one to like controversy, so all of a sudden he wasn't excited anymore. But he felt it necessary for me to meet the interim principal, who would be my assistant principal. So he introduced us and then he left.

During that visit, Steven took a tour of the campus and met several staff members, not knowing which might be supporters and which might be in opposition. He did feel that at the time he could just be nice to everyone and they would automatically accept him.

> But something that let me know that I needed to be careful at that school happened the following weekend. A friend and I went to the campus just to walk around when nobody was there. There was a sign on somebody's door inviting staff to see her to sign the petition to keep the interim principal. I knew that the interim principal did not support the petition and that was a good thing.
>
> However, it became gravely apparent after I was appointed that there was a problem because the community got involved with trying to get my appointment overturned.
>
> It started when the PTA president called a few days later and asked if I would meet her at the school and I agreed to do so. I thought that was a good thing and that I could begin to build relationships. I got there and was basically ambushed by fifteen ladies with 150 typed questions that they expected me to answer. I figured out pretty quickly that I couldn't let them know that anything ruffled my feathers so I answered the questions just as quickly as they fired them. I think they were getting a little bit ticked off because they couldn't 'get to me'.

The questions Steven was asked were related to how he was going to handle such issues as the playground, ensure that all children would be reading, his organization of different systems, and what programs he was planning to keep or get rid of.   They also asked him what made him think he was qualified for the job. "So they got personal, too, and they had the audacity to ask me why I wouldn't let the interim principal stay on as principal and be her assistant."

After getting through that meeting, Steven asked to meet with the PTA president alone, which was what he went there for. In that meeting she advised him that she supported the school, but would not commit to supporting him.

Steven pointed out that the high school where he was as assistant principal and Edison Elementary were just across the highway from each other and that most of the Edison students would eventually attend that high school. Some parents at Edison also had students at the high school, where one of Steven's primary responsibilities was to enforce discipline.

> So I had already unknowingly ticked off some key parents at Edison, a couple of whom happened to be employees at Edison, over discipline situations with older kids. I did not make all of these connections, I didn't know, but people don't forget easily. I am much more well-known than I even realize sometimes because I had worked at a magnet school, downtown, and at the neighborhood high school, so people just know my name. Having worked in the same area of town all this time— connections are tight. I had one parent for example, whose child was leaving to go to middle school, so she wasn't even going to be an Edison parent and she was one of the most adamant people who wanted to make sure I didn't become the principal. She just hated my guts. Even though it was just a handful of people who were complaining about me, they were loud often and it was uncomfortable.

During this time, there was still a lot of vocalization about Steven and the principalship. One tactic that Steven learned about was a walkout at the school prior to his arrival to protest his assignment as the new principal. Many parents came with signs and students and teachers left the building, marching outside the school. The interim principal tried to discourage the walkout by notifying the Central Office and asking people not to participate. She told them that she wanted the healing process to begin and that the community needed to accept the decision of the Board. The Deputy Superintendent then called a community meeting.

> The representative School Board member, staff, community members and I were invited. We went into the cafeteria and the School Board member got up there in front of about 80 people and said. 'Mr. S has been appointed principal and the only way to change that is for possibly a majority of the Board to feel that needs to be changed.' I was sitting in the audience and the interim principal was sitting in the audience and I had to listen to what the School Board member was saying.
>
> There were many times, you know, when you think I would just say 'screw it' and leave. But the Deputy Superintendent stood up and began to respond to questions about the principal selection process, which was apparently the source of the problem. The community felt that they had been able to pick the last two principals, who had also been assistant principals at the school. Because this interim had been the assistant principal as well, they wondered why she didn't become the principal. The cycle had been broken, but the community did not understand the existing process.

The Deputy Superintendent shared that there had been two cycles of interviews in the current process, something that not even Steven knew; but, each time, the interview committee's first choice was Steven. She did not feel that she could go against the wishes of that representative group of teachers and parents. Another factor was that the interim principal had not completed her administrative certification process and Central Office was committed to hiring certified administrators.

> A lot of hurtful things were said, even though people said it wasn't
> directed at me. They just wanted the interim principal. A female
> minister present said that she didn't know me from Adam, but she just
> didn't understand why they couldn't have the person they wanted.
>
> Then it got to the point where they asked the interim to speak and it
> was very solemn. You could hear people crying and the interim principal
> merely sated that she wanted what was best for kids and that the choice
> had been made. She told them that she was going to be okay with that
> and that she wanted everybody else to be okay with it. It was the perfect
> thing to say. When they asked me to speak the only thing I said was 'Just
> give me a chance.' And I stopped. I didn't say anything else. And that is
> what I think sealed it. They realized that I hadn't even had a chance to
> begin to show what I could do.

It is important to reiterate that all of this was going on during the spring semester

of 1999. Steven was still an assistant principal at the high school and was preparing for

the role as high school summer school principal.

> I thought about things that I thought I could do to bring people together,
> but I didn't spend my whole summer thinking about what I was going to
> do to make people like me. I thought that the best thing that I could do to
> get people to accept me as the principal of the school was to do a good
> job for the kids. So I organized things, got the school cleaned, and got
> ready for the school year to begin. I wanted to have the best possible
> start to a school year. I felt that people would begin to accept me as soon
> as they saw I was capable. Eventually, over the course of that first year,
> that is exactly what happened. You could just see people melting. They
> couldn't find reason to hate me, and they had wanted to; but they
> couldn't find a reason to.

As Steven got on with the school year, he found that there were very few parents

who cared about what that small vocal group had tried to do.

> Even the handful of teachers that had tried to fight my appointment had
> decided that it would be best to just try and get along with the new
> principal and administrative staff so that they could do their jobs because
> that can just consume you when you try to find reasons to hate someone.
> The people that had really supported the interim began to realize that the
> process had worked its way through. The people on the interview
> committee had also begun to talk to people because they caught some
> grief too because they had recommended me instead of the interim.

As Steven moved forward, he continued to work hard on important issues of concern. Discipline had been an especially troubling issue and he had made great strides with a new discipline program. He wanted not only to continue traditions, but also to build new ones that would be a part of what would have kids take pride and ownership in their school. Each year, the 5th grade class paints a wall with a mural that has special meaning to them. Naming a Student of the Month, who was then taken out to lunch with the principal, was another tradition Steven initiated. Steven wanted the teachers to see that he was focusing on the positive and he believes that was what had people accept him as the principal.

"If you are focusing on the kids; what's good for kids and what's going to help them become more self-confident and build their self-esteem, then the other stuff takes care of itself."

Steven was also able to draw on contacts he had made working at the Central Office, to respond to special needs when the campus required assistance from district sources. This enabled staff and community to see that he knew how to get things done and done quickly.

In addition, Steven had the opportunity to hire 16 new staff members that first year and 12 more in the second year. By his third year at Edison only two staff members left, and he saw that the teacher retention had become evidence of his effectiveness as the principal. Parent surveys also showed favorable responses regarding the performance of the principal.

"Our TAAS results spoke for themselves. In both my first and second year at Edison, we were only one or two students off in every category from receiving a 'Recognized' rating. That we improved those results alone, showed that we were doing the right things, in spite of the challenges we were faced with."

Due to realignment in the District, Edison was assigned to a new vertical team in the 1999-2000 school year, and therefore was also under the supervision of a new Area Superintendent. Steven spoke about the support he received from the new Area Superintendent. There was a definite difference in the support he received as a result of the change in his supervisors.

> My new Area Superintendent was not afraid of controversy and I did not feel that I had to walk on eggshells with him. I don't react well to scare tactics and ultimatums and he did not use them. His leadership got a better product from me. I also had a strong relationship with the principals in that area because I had been an intern there. I have three special peers who really supported me by listening, sharing ideas, materials, and experiences. I felt like I could count on them more than principals I didn't know as well. Changing areas helped me to do my job better.

Steven found that the implementation of a significant district initiative while trying to manage everything else as a new principal was challenging. In addition he found it necessary to spend time making sure the staff and community knew that he had a good working relationship with his assistant principal.

Steven would offer the following advice to succession principals:

- Don't ignore what is going on around you.

- If you are not sure what to say, don't say anything.

- Acknowledge that you have heard what has been said, but wait until you are 100% sure of what you want to say.

- Investigate and know all possible connections that underlie people's motives.

- Just because someone has a title in the district, it doesn't mean that you can trust her/him.

- This job is political and some people will be more concerned about themselves than about others.

- Let the results speak for themselves.

- Create your own circumstances.

- Question everything: be sure that you are clear before you step out on a limb.

- Your job is to do good things for kids, not to have people like you.

Reflections

Steven's succession experience with his parents and school community actually began four months before he even took over the principalship at Edison. While he was still responsible for his duties as a high school assistant principal, he was forced to deal with the issues caused by a small, yet very vocal group of parents and community members who opposed his appointment as the principal. Steven's experience began the night he was to be named as principal at Edison as he watched the School Board question his ability to effectively manage the school while only five members endorsed his appointment. That alone was a crushing blow.

Yet despite a less than optimal beginning, Steven met the challenges of the parents in a straight-forward manner, by responding to questions designed to challenge his abilities, and by forging a strong working relationship with the interim principal whom he would succeed in the principalship. This was a crucial step given that the district assigned the interim principal to be Steven's assistant principal. Steven also focused on putting programs and systems into place that would prove his capabilities as the principal of Edison Elementary. His relationships with his Area Superintendent and his fellow principals were of great importance to him during this time.

Jonathan.

Introduction

Jonathan is an Hispanic male in his mid thirties. He is a very pleasant young man with an optimistic outlook on life. He holds a masters degree and has 17 years of experience in education, all in AISD. During his career as a middle school teacher he received the "Sallie Mae 1st Year Teacher of the Year" Award, was named the Teacher of the Year at his middle school campus, was a finalist in the TRACOR Exemplary Teacher competition, and was named a Woodrow Wilson Mathematics Teacher Fellow by Princeton University.

Jonathan has also been a Central Office curriculum coordinator and a high school assistant principal. In 1999, Jonathan was named principal of Krueger Elementary, a small school in central Austin serving approximately 280 students. Ninety-five percent of the children are Hispanic and 98% qualify for the free and reduced lunch program.

Jonathan was the third principal to be named to Krueger Elementary School in five years. As he took on his role as the new campus leader, Jonathan found that systems for operating the school effectively were not in place. In fact, he soon learned that the leadership styles of the past two principals were totally opposite of his own style. Jonathan saw the need to put numerous systems into place quickly and immediately ran into opposition from staff members who had been given almost free rein to operate as they had pleased.

Jonathan's Story

My interview with Jonathan began with a discussion about an experience that most impacted his succession year. His response was a story that any principal would find difficult to endure.

> I vividly remember arriving at school one August morning prior to the start of the instructional day. Before having a chance to get out of my vehicle, I was approached by a staff member in distress. Teacher A informed me that teacher B and teacher C were passing out a flyer inviting staff members to a private meeting to discuss teachers' dissatisfaction with me. Teacher A stated that many teachers were uncomfortable with the information shared by the two teachers approaching them and did not want any association with what was being publicized. I thanked the teacher for this information and made my way to the office.
>
> Shortly thereafter, I telephoned teacher B and asked her to visit with me during her planning period. During this conference, I shared with her the information had been provided to me by teacher A, whom I did not identify by name. I specifically asked teacher B if she in fact was passing out flyers to teachers inviting them to this meeting. Teacher B denied the accusation made by teacher A. I shared with teacher B that the passing out of such flyers did disrupt the educational process and if I found this accusation to be true, it would be documented as such. It was then time to meet with teacher C. I asked the same questions and she denied being associated with the morning's event as well. She, too, was told the exact

same thing about possible consequences if she indeed was involved in this type of unprofessional behavior.

Jonathan related that within a few weeks, teachers B & C had each filed grievances against him. They both claimed that they perceived his meetings with them in the early weeks of school, regarding the passing out of flyers, was harassment. The two individual grievances were heard at the Central Office with a representative of the Department of Human Resources, each teacher, and Jonathan. Both grievances were found in his favor and did not reach the second level.

Once again Jonathan hoped things would get back to normal. However, the next week, the school secretary asked for reassignment to another campus because she felt the workload she had been given was too great and too demanding. The staff presented Jonathan with a petition, which stated that they felt that the secretary's complaint was justified. They wanted her workload diminished—they wanted her to stay. Jonathan refused to alter the secretary's assignment, as he was merely requiring her to perform according to the district's job description. Again, staff members found that Jonathan was a leader who would stay true to his convictions.

Jonathan returned to the issue of the meeting that was to have been held earlier.

> A couple of weeks passed by and I did not hear anything about the after school meeting. I thought the issue had just died out but I thought too soon. One afternoon I was working in my office and was interrupted by a representative of the largest teacher organization in AISD. She handed me a list of concerns presented by staff members and asked me to respond to them as soon as possible. The representative made her way out of the building. I was dumbfounded by the concerns presented and considered them to be ridiculous. Not once had anyone approached me about any of those concerns from staff members.

The following are some of the complaints presented to Jonathan:

- Teachers did not want to write lesson plans.

- Teachers objected to the quotes of the week printed in the principal's newsletter; they viewed them as having negative undertones.

- Teachers did not want to be accountable for reading a weekly newsletter.

- Teachers did not want any faculty meetings to go beyond 3:30.

Being a new and inexperienced principal, I chose to address these concerns at a faculty meeting. I did not commit to giving in to any of the requests being made; because I knew that what I was asking teachers to do was not unethical, or hurtful to kids. I was simply holding teachers accountable to exemplary teaching practices and implementing district initiatives. It was obvious that they were not accustomed to this. My Area Superintendent came to the meeting and after I talked to the staff, he advised them that what I was asking them to do was aligned with district initiatives and nothing asked of the staff was unethical or hurtful to students. He also addressed the need for us to raise student achievement as we had just barely received an acceptable rating from the state the year before.

Three to four weeks passed. Jonathan began to receive numerous complaints from teachers regarding the performance of a key staff member on the campus. Based on his prior experiences, yet also concerned about the well being of his students, Jonathan looked into the concerns raised by the staff.

I discovered that their concerns regarding this staff member were legitimate and I began to document her deficiencies, which led to the development and initiation of a professional growth plan. The staff member then filed a grievance against me, accusing me of attacking her professionally with inaccurate and biased data regarding her job performance. Her grievance also ended at level one and was found in my favor. Her deficiencies continued and so did my documentation. She then chose to file a second grievance, this time for retaliating against her for her initial grievance against me. This went to level two and was heard by my Area Superintendent. When he ruled in my favor, she challenged his decision and hired an attorney to take the grievance to level three. This involved my Area Superintendent, the Superintendent's

designee (our general counsel), the teacher, and her attorney. Once
again, the ruling was in my favor and she asked to be released from her
current assignment in order to accept a teaching position at another
school. Her request was honored.

Things went back to normal and it seemed as though everyone was focused on the

business of teaching. The staff was fairly quiet--for about four months. Then Jonathan

was hit with another challenge. The teachers had asked their teacher organization to

conduct a climate survey among the campus staff.

"I asked for a copy of the survey and realized that it was not a climate survey at

all, but instead was designed to personally attack me. These were the categories and

issues:

- Principal promotes a collaborative relationship with faculty

    o Seeks faculty input

    o Implements faculty suggestions

    o Has empathy for staff

    o Resolves faculty concerns

    o Uses positive problem solving

    o Treats faculty equitably

    o Principal is accessible

- Principal avoids excessive demands on teachers' time during and after the duty

  day

    o Faculty meetings kept to 45 minutes

    o Planning period is respected

    o Paperwork is not excessive

- o Values my time

- o Minimizes meetings and paperwork

- Principal fosters healthy climate

  - o Maintains professional atmosphere

  - o I am treated as a professional

  - o Climate has negative effect on staff moral

  - o Gives me support and praises me

  - o Fosters a healthy environment

Each item was to be responded to with agree or disagree.

"I called my Area Superintendent and shared the survey with him and asked if he felt I should endorse it. His response was, 'Absolutely not!' So I told the organization that they would not be allowed to issue the survey on my campus."

However, Jonathan continued to receive calls almost weekly from the teacher organization addressing issues that they wanted to see resolved and asked again to issue the climate survey on his campus. Once again both Jonathan and his Area Superintendent refused the request based on the nature of the questions.

> But the survey went out anyway. It was mailed to the staff's homes. I found out because one of the teachers brought me her copy. The teacher organization mailed a copy of the very unfavorable results to my Area Superintendent and the Superintendent. My Area Superintendent was incensed at the tactics that had been utilized. He and I met with the campus teacher representative and the organization representatives about the survey. They asked us to respond to the results of survey. My Area Superintendent asked for the names of the people who had responded to the survey, but the teacher organization representatives refused to provide them. They argued adamantly that the names were confidential and that they did not have to, nor would they, give them.

In the end, Jonathan's Area Superintendent refused to validate the survey. He told

the organization's representatives that without names of respondents, there was no way

to assure the accuracy of the results and that he would not entertain any further

discussion on the matter. The organization's representatives were not happy when they

left the meeting. But the survey was not mentioned again.

The last two months of school proceeded with no further staff incidents and

Jonathan was able to spend that time focusing on the needs of his students. Eight of

Krueger's twenty teachers either transferred to other schools or resigned at the end of the

school year.

I asked Jonathan if he felt there were things that had hindered or supported his

effectiveness as a principal as he dealt with these numerous challenging issues during his

first year as a principal. He said that the extreme amount of time and energy spent

dealing with these issues had made his focus on the real academic issues and needs of

the children very difficult.

> So much of my time was consumed by preparing responses, preparing for
> grievance hearings, documenting staff members as necessary, dealing
> with the teacher organization, and trying to keep up staff moral and
> worrying about what the Central Office's perception would be of me as a
> principal because of all the personnel issues. I also felt like much of the
> teachers' time was not as focused on teaching and learning because of all
> of the distractions these situations caused. And yet I had to put systems
> into place because my predecessors had not.
>   But I was so grateful to my Area Superintendent, who was always so
> supportive and insightful. On the first staff development day of my
> second year, he came and once again reinforced to the staff his support of
> and confidence in me as the principal of Krueger.
>   I am also especially grateful to two of my close friends who are also
> elementary principals. I spent hours on the phone or over dinners with
> them just talking about what I was going through. I would ask them for
> advice and found that they validated what I was already thinking. I was

and am so fortunate to have these friends. We are still there for each other.

I also knew that the decisions I was making were in the best interest of the students and I stayed focused on that.

I wondered what evidence Jonathan had utilized to determine his effectiveness and how he interpreted that evidence. When eight dissenting teachers left at that first year, I was able to hire staff committed to my values and goals for the school. We received an 'Acceptable' rating that year, but achievement in all areas did increase for all students. I also had numerous letters of support from parents, and received an exemplary appraisal from my Area Superintendent.

During my second year, there was less support for those teachers who still did not support me as their principal. Their peers refused to listen and eight more teachers transferred to other schools or resigned from the district that year. I had fondly become known as the 'Grievance King' and several of my peers called me for advice in handling situations on their own campuses. However, the greatest evidence was that we received a 'Recognized' rating on AEIS because all student groups achieved a minimum of 80% in all areas of the TAAS. Several were even in the 90th percentile. The teachers and students had really worked hard to make that happen. In my third year at Krueger, I hardly had any interference from the teacher organization. I also had hired over three-fourths of the existing staff.

Jonathan offered this advice to a succeeding principal who found her/himself in a similar situation:

- Ask yourself, "Am I doing what is good for kids?"

- Ask yourself, "Am I asking anyone to do anything unethical?"

- Don't be afraid to ask for help or support. Pick up the phone and call right away.

Reflections

Jonathan arrived at Krueger Elementary anxious to work with his staff to improve student achievement. He soon realized that the systems necessary to do that had not been put into place by former principals and that the teachers had not experienced the kind of rigor that would be needed be put them into place. In his attempt to focus on student achievement and address the challenges, Jonathan began putting those systems and procedures into place. What ensued was not what he had expected, nor what he was prepared for.

Teachers immediately began to oppose Jonathan and his plans. The majority of Jonathan's time as a succeeding principal was taken by dealing with problems related to staff and interference from the teacher organization. As a first year principal, Jonathan was without background experience to prepare him for the constant barrage of opposition and found that he was consumed by defending his actions and his systems. This defense occurred on campus during meetings with individual staff members, with the group as a whole, with members of the teacher organization, and in grievance procedures.

Thanks to the support of a few close peers and especially his Area Superintendent, Jonathan endured the actions of the staff and the teacher organization. Jonathan remained focused on the children and doing what was right for them. He did not compromise his values. His efforts proved to be effective.

Marilyn

Introduction

Marilyn is a vibrant woman—tall and lanky with beautiful shoulder length blonde hair. She holds two masters degrees; one is from a well-known state university and the other from a renowned ivy-league university. She holds educator certifications from two states. With 30 years in education, Marilyn has served as a classroom teacher, Graduate Assistant to the Principal, In-service and Public Awareness Coordinator, Special Education Resource Lead Teacher, Special Education Cooperative Director, District Coordinator for Prevention Education, Assistant Principal and Principal, and Special Education Director.

Marilyn has conducted research on the topics such as Drug Free Schools and Communities, Drug Free Schools Violence Prevention, Texas Commission of Alcohol/Drug Abuse, Association of Retarded Citizens Community Impact Study, and served on a five state planning team for the Southwest Program for Drug Free Schools and has been published numerous times.

Her honors and awards include:

- Special Educator of the Year, Northside Teacher Association

- Outstanding Service Award, Northside School District Board of Trustees

- Program Development Award, D.A.R.E.

- Supporting Our Youth Award, San Antonio Police Officers Association

- The Children's Award, Northside Counselors Association

- Project Heart Award, San Antonio Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse

- Drug Free Hotelmen Award & Keynote Speaker, Luby's Corporation

- Drug Free Schools/National Drug Free Campus Award, US Department of Education

- Lay Person Of the Year, South Texas Counselors Association

Marilyn joined AISD in 1998 as the Assistant Principal of Monroe Elementary, the school she has served as Principal since 1999. Monroe Elementary is nestled in the hills of northwest Austin and serves approximately 700 mostly Anglo students from some of Austin's most affluent families.

Marilyn's Story

Marilyn is feisty, passionate about her work, and is a champion for all children. I was intrigued when I first received Marilyn's written responses to my questionnaire and realized that her response to the question regarding a positive experience in her succession process in her current position, was not at all about her current position, but related to an experience many years ago in a different district.

When I called Marilyn to ask her if she could share a positive experience related to her current position, she said, "You know, Brenda, so sadly, I can't." Her poignant response to the request to describe a negative experience is so profound that I feel it is worth including in total.

> On 9/9/99, I dialed 911. I could not even give my name to the operator; I could only wheeze and gasp. Uncertain of whether or not they would find me, and hoping a neighbor would come to my side, (none did) I lay alone waiting on the sidewalk in front of my house for the ambulance grasping an inhaler that I was unable to inhale. Somewhere around 1:00 a.m., I was rushed to the emergency room having a mold induced asthma attack.

Mold that, I soon discovered, filled my school. At the time, I thought I might die.

In the dawn, I crawled into a cab, shoeless, clad only in a bathrobe, and rode back home with the adhesive and patches from the monitors still stuck to my legs and chest where wires had been attached, got dressed and went to work. There has never been a more horridly lonely moment in my life.

What I understand now about the event was that I had asthma restricting my exhalations and vocal cord dysfunction restricting my inhalations. It is a deadly combination.

That is how I began my succession year at Monroe Elementary. My emotions and my cognitive abilities were confused as a result of over-prescribed levels of steroids and harsh pharmaceuticals, which caused acute sleep deprivation. Staff members were ill, children coughed incessantly. There were no laws or even guidelines for air quality standards in schools and I just wanted to walk out. But I didn't.

And on 9/10/99 I went to school because I felt that, as the principal, I had to be there: to explain what was going on, to get answers for people. I had been a very healthy person and something was not right for me and for the kids and staff. I had to be seen as someone who had not jumped off the ship but was going to be there and ride this thing out.

I have kept videotapes of meetings and have, just now, found the strength to sit and watch them. I have a file full of documents and scraps of newspaper chronicling the events leading up to the evacuation of the school on 2-29-00 and through the present move back to Monroe. Thinking I would write a case study and submit it to a professor at Harvard, I have hung on to plenty of stuff, but find that it repulses me. I am filled with more than a modicum of resentment toward this district and disgust with my own slavish nature to stay the course.

Brenda, my time of succession at Monroe has been the most hellish of my life. Whether my own poor state of health, the constant struggle to convince downtown that there was a problem, or the aftermath of a school shattered physically and emotionally, or some contorted combination of all that and forces that I am not aware of, I find it nearly impossible to write about the negative of my succession year.

Report

When I sat down with Marilyn, I shared my reaction to her questionnaire and asked her if she could tell me more about the history of the situation that had so colored her succession experience. She was eager to respond.

What had happened at that school had been going on since shortly after the school was built, so for about 30 years. They had roof leaks that had gone undetected and not repaired so there was a 30-year history of water penetration in nearly every classroom, especially the library. There were architectural and structural qualities of that building that led themselves to water penetration, such as the floating slab. The school was perched over this cave of sorts; the floating slab was an especially porous quality concrete and it leaked water from this cave area. Looking at the building from the top is like looking at a pair of binoculars, and the round building was lacking flashing were it met the square or straight walls of the classrooms. So we had water penetration from the bottom, top, and from the sides. The problem was certainly there long before I ever arrived.

Marilyn shared that what had made this particular year unique was that not only was it a rainy year, but also the building was under construction. The most water-damaged part of the building, the library in the center of one of the circles, was being completely demolished and a new library was being built next to the school. When the contaminated water damaged library was torn apart, mold colonies that had formed on the inner walls began to do what mold does when it is threatened and that is to eat ravenously and reproduce wildly.

We had, prior to that year, a number of episodes of mold growth on the tops of desks. It looked like shaving cream, as one teacher said. We suspected there was mold; we smelled mold. The building had this mustiness to it. And, when they went into the center, you could see it. The contractors were sloppy and didn't partition the building off in any way, not even with plastic sheeting and you could see particulate matter floating in the air. It made it difficult to see from one end of the hall to the other. It was just so thick with dust and particulate matter. I know now that a lot of that particulate matter was actually a high concentration of not just dirt, but mold spores and micro toxins.

Marilyn went on to share that in addition to what could be seen and smelled in the air, many students went to the school nurse's clinic with a lot of upper respiratory and asthma complaints.

A number of children, by the mid afternoon in the gymnasium, were lethargic or were acting out behaviors, which we know now, was because there was such a low oxygen level in the air. Also, there were a number of staff members who had pretty severe symptoms, mostly upper respiratory, and a number of people with nose bleeds that just seemed to go on for days.

In addition, an inadequate air conditioning system was not taking in outside air and cooling it, but merely re-cooling existing air. It was not removing the moisture from the air. Not only were we under construction with the mold being released into the air and moving around, we had the A/C problem. That alone, I found out later, was enough to create major problems with air quality. The service center was aware of this problem, as well, and I can only assume their superiors were made aware of it.

Shortly after September 9th, Marilyn learned that on the same night she was at the emergency center, a Monroe student and a Monroe first grade teacher were there for the same type of upper respiratory ailments. She also looked at the nurse's clinic records for that day and found a high number of students had complained of similar ailments.

I asked Marilyn to tell me about any communication she was having with the district office during this time.

Because we were part of the bond project, we had weekly meetings with construction management and the contractors, and the architects. Shortly after 9/9/99, I was in a meeting in the construction trailer and when I reported this, the contractor became irate and asked me what I was accusing him of. He walked off the job and closed down the job for a few days. He was finally persuaded to come back and help resolve this problem and not stall construction.

During this entire time, since I was a new principal, I had numerous phone calls from my Area Superintendent and his secretary. They were always in touch asking about the nature of the problem, what was happening with construction, how the children were and how what was happening with the Monroe building was interfering with good learning. It was refreshing because he believed that there really were teachers with legitimate symptoms; he didn't doubt that what was happening in the building had a very real physical effect on staff and children.

For many others at Central, that was a difficult sell. There had been construction in other schools and people hadn't gotten sick. Why should

it be any different at Monroe? There was never a problem with my Area Superintendent. He was a quick study and when we spoke about the microbiology of mold and its properties, he got it immediately and began asking 'How can we protect children and staff?'

The construction was what finally pushed Monroe over the limit with our particulate levels. In that particular category there are some safeguards and none of the contractors involved wanted to be liable for any particular kind of damage. The district Construction Management division was directly dealing with the contractors who sure didn't want this on their record. And it was through the work of the contractors and engineers that we were able to bring in a team of engineers who investigated our air quality.

I must say that, because the Superintendent was new, we invited him to read for an event we were having in October. As we were going the classroom, I took him to the dungeon, that cave-like area under the building, and I showed him what we were living above. He was a little taken back by such dankness, the nastiness, and did invite his Associate Superintendent in charge of Construction to come and see it. When he came to see our situation, it was evident that he had never experienced problems of this nature before.

"Getting support was a slow and difficult process. It wasn't until right after the winter holiday that we did the staff survey." Marilyn administered a Center of Disease Control survey to the staff, which everyone took anonymously. The data that came back was profoundly skewed for such a young staff, with so many people having the same respiratory symptoms. "We had already moved teachers and kids out of rooms because they were getting sick. We had a couple more teachers go the ER. The head of the student Health Services at Central Office, who is also affiliated with the Seton Hospitals in Austin, was also interested in what was going on and the liability involved."

She went on to say, "I made a call to a friend out East and asked him to check with some engineers at MIT and get me names of people I could use as a source for finding out about sick building syndrome and air pollution indoors and what were the levels for kids."

Marilyn stayed in close communication with her Area Superintendent and also began working with a parent, an indoor air quality engineer with the University of Texas, who put her I touch with same person that MIT had recommended. It happened that was he was in Austin with the Texas Department of Public Health and had published works on the chemistry and microbiology of mold and it effects on adults.

"But we didn't have any information on children. So we had Seton Hospital, UT, Texas Tech & MIT all involved in looking. There were no OSHA standards for children and the air they breathe in schools. So it was a brand new topic for many people and frankly there was nobody in AISD who was an air quality specialist."

All communication was channeled through Marilyn's Area Superintendent, who kept the superintendent's office informed. Construction Management also communicated with the superintendent. In early February, data returned primarily from Texas Tech and an engineer who was sending his samples there, went straight to the Superintendent's office and everyone else Marilyn could think of to send it to.

> And if you are not in the habit of reading microbiology reports, and most educators are not, we tried to find a way to take the data and say, 'Okay, this is what it means.' Our data was so extraordinary that the University of Texas created a graduate level course and the only topic was Monroe Elementary. Our data were so abhorrent and there was kind of a little war of sorts between Texas Tech and UT. Texas Tech thought they had discovered a new form of mold growing under our building and a doctoral candidate from Tech was anxious to put his name on this new genus of mold.

Marilyn had done a lot of research about molds and air quality, looking at doctoral research from Texas Tech, information from the Health Department, and MIT.

We knew that stachybotrys along with the cocktail of other extremely toxic molds could be really dangerous to kids with compromised immune systems. Because of the rights of privacy of students, nobody except the teacher, the nurse and I knew that we had a child in that situation. We also had another child with such a strong reaction that he stopped attending classes and we home schooled him. We had already moved one teacher's classroom and sealed off a classroom that was just so bad because of the illness of so many students and the teacher. By the time the report would come back, contractors were sick and people had been pulled off the construction job.

But what will live in my mind forever is the early morning of February 29th. We were having a performance in the cafeteria by a local theater group for 3rd-5th graders. I was standing in back and could not hear the performers because there was so much coughing. And it just became clear that we had a really sick group of kids who had wonderful health care. But, in spite of their parents' and pediatricians' best efforts, these kids were still really affected by the air quality in that building. Having that realization, even more than the mold reports that came in a few hours later, I knew that I could no longer work there in good conscience. It would have been thoroughly unethical of me to allow kids and teachers to remain in that building.

About 11:00 that morning, I was notified that the data from Texas Tech was so skewed they were sending it back again to make sure there was nothing wrong with their measure and indeed we had extraordinarily high measures of many different molds and stachybotrys which were growing in the light fixtures and dropping in the hallways that students were walking through every day.

Marilyn and the Superintendent had planned what would be done if the data results were alarming, and they were. "So we got out. We had an emergency evacuation during the lunch hour and removed students and staff to the nearby Professional Development Academy (PDA), formerly an elementary school renovated for district staff development trainings. They brought buses and the office came out in droves to help with the evacuation. There were TV stations everywhere and we moved the kids." For the next three days, Monroe students did not attend school.

Marilyn and her Area Superintendent, having anticipated that this type of situation might occur, had looked at other campuses where there would possibly be room for some of the Monroe students. A plan was made that would temporarily relocate the staff of the PDA, send third, fourth, and fifth graders to three separate campuses, and keep the kindergarten, first, and second graders together at the Professional Development Academy.

Marilyn was in constant communication with her PTA, Campus Advisory Council, and parents over the next several days and nights discussing the plan. The move of fourth graders was most controversial, as the parents were especially concerned about the neighborhood in which their children would be attending school. It was dramatically different from the northwest location of Monroe Elementary. Some parents chose not to send their children to the different schools. Seventy-seven students enrolled in private schools and did not return to Monroe following the evacuation.

Children went to Monroe each morning and were bussed to their respective schools for the remainder of the year.

> There were numerous promises that Monroe would be ready for occupancy in August of 2000, but I was worried about the actuality of that, given what I had seen going on at the construction end. So we began talking about alternatives. The Superintendent formed a committee of parents that met weekly to discuss the options. There were some very heated discussions. I felt it was very important for teachers to know where they would be. It wasn't until after school was out, when it became evident that Monroe was not going to be ready, and it was finally decided to move enough portable buildings to the Professional Development Academy so that all Monroe students could be located in one place. Before we moved back to Monroe we had to be absolutely sure that the air quality was safe for the staff and students. We did not move back into the Monroe campus until August of 2001 school year.

Looking at her perception of her effectiveness as the campus leader that year was easy to do, despite the challenges Marilyn had faced.

> I think what happened was that I came in with this notion of being an instructional leader—someone focused on students and their learning and teachers and their learning. I felt like I had this rich experience at Harvard and knew a lot of what was current leading edge of brain-based research, curriculum, understanding communities, and strategic thinking about leadership. So I was chomping the bit raring to go with this really strong group of teachers. But I found out that I wore a hard hat and instead of being an instructional leader, I was like a construction leader. And there was a little irony in all this thinking.   Because, you know, it doesn't matter where you go to school, they just never fully prepare you for what you meet when you go into a campus and you become an instructional leader. Putting theory into practice was almost impossible that year.

Marilyn readily spoke to the issue of data regarding that year and what it would tell about her effectiveness during her succession experience.

> I do that with great pride. Our TAAS scores did not go down and even in fifth grade, where just about every child identified as GT jumped ship and went to a private school, I could share positive reports with staff and parents. We still taught and kids were successful. That gave them such pride.   We stayed exemplary way up in the high 90's. We even went up in math, and that's because our teachers taught and taught and taught some more.
>   I remember having conversations, even early that September, that something good would come out of this and benefit the larger community, not just Monroe. What came to mind for me were the stories of the children and women who worked the textile mills up and down the north Atlantic coast at the turn of the century. It took a series of fires and explosions for the people who owned the mills, to realize that this was bad air quality, that there was so much fiber in the air that kids were sick, sick, sick. Women working there were sick, sick, sick; and as we know from history, there would be these huge explosions and people would perish.
>   I kept having a sense that our air was foul, our children and, primarily, women, were getting sick and there was such a parallel between this and Lowell, Massachusetts, that I just couldn't let that go. I felt it was time for some awareness. And there is just enough piss and

vinegar and fight in my blood to say, 'Here is a cause, here is some awareness, and we're going to stick together and do something about it,' which we did. It ultimately ended up in public awareness.

When the Superintendent asked Marilyn if she thought this was a problem in other schools, she said she could certainly imagine that it was. Within months after the Monroe situation, twelve other schools in various locations in the district were identified with similar mold problems and they were remediated.

It was my responsibility to make it right. Looking back, even at moments in the worse of times, I knew that we were drawing together as a tight close knit staff in a way that hadn't happened before. There had been factions, there had been petty bickering, grade level to grade level and even on the grade level and suddenly it became clear that our focus was all of us staying healthy and managing learning. In spite of what was going on, we began to take great pride in it and would tell jokes and stories at staff meetings. We all wore hard hats just for the comedy of it to kick off that second year. We told jokes about what we managed to do over the buzz of saws. We just found humor in the situation. It also taught us what we were made of. And a couple of teachers who needed to go went, and we were all better off for it.

Marilyn pointed to several things that she felt had supported her during this challenging time.

There was never a question that in our Area we were about 'Children First' and it was easy to translate that to staff. We were teachers and that is what brought us joy. That came from our Area and our Area Superintendent. When my colleagues said we had a problem, we knew there was a problem and we were there to support each other. I knew that they were there for me unconditionally. I am so grateful for that family of support.

We had educated, well-informed parents. They were engineers, attorneys, and pediatricians who all worked together to keep everyone informed and to make sure they were advocates for the children. They trusted me and the staff and my Area Superintendent. Most of them asked why we had not made the move sooner.

For the most part, the staff really hung together. We were also embraced by the principals and teachers whose campuses we had invaded. Those teams who were on other campuses really became strong

and grew because they had to rely on each other during their isolation from the rest of the staff. But they also got to see how other campuses did things and one grade level came back and made a plan and began doing the same kind of team teaching they had seen on their host campus. You either get tighter as a crew, or you jump ship. I think we got tighter. I think that having an experienced staff also enabled them to adjust to the changes more easily.

      I also knew the strengths and weaknesses of my staff and utilized that information. This was especially true in my relationship with my assistant principal who, if things were not going her way, would try to undermine my authority. But that's a whole other story.

Marilyn also recognized challenges to her effectiveness during that year. "The challenge was sick kids and sick teachers. But that's the first need we have to address, the very first thing. Is the environment healthy enough for kids to be there?"

Dealing with the Central Office was a constant source of frustration for Marilyn. She felt there was no trust that what she was relaying was true.

> But if the building smelled bad, if contractors were getting sick, and the air was bad, and we had all of this since September 9, why did it take until February 29th to convince Central that we needed to get out of that mess? I understand that the science of air quality was new, but I know that the science of medicine is not new and that it should have been very clear just looking at those statistics alone that something was dreadfully wrong. We had all this information, why did it take so long for us to move out? There had been a two-year history of illness and mold. One of the engineers, who has a national safety business, said to me after we had the air quality samples, 'You are lucky; you are lucky that nobody died on your watch.' He was right.

As we were drawing near the end of our interview, Marilyn shared with me that this experience had been like a cleansing for her and that she had really appreciated the chance to tell this story. With that, I asked her what advice she would give to a succeeding principal finding her/himself in a similar situation. She emphatically listed the following:

- Know your staff, especially those for whom change is almost like losing a limb.

- Be true to yourself, but also know yourself and your weaknesses and strengths.

- Know the strengths and weaknesses of your staff.

- Keep an emotionally healthy workplace by communicating.

- Be objective and analytical.

- Know who in the organization can help you answer questions.

- Ask for people to bring their strengths to help get you closer to resolution.

- A good sense of humor is essential.

- Make connections with people.

- Don't be afraid to take risks.

I loved Marilyn's final comment. "Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy. Love what you're doing and the people you are working with, and to hell with the rest."

Reflections

Of all of the stories I had read in the questionnaires or heard in the focus groups, this one haunted me the most. In speaking about her experiences with students and staff, Marilyn spoke with pride and you could hear the warmth in her voice. As I listened to her recount the events of her succession year regarding the mold and health issues, I heard a different tone. I heard the frustration that was so evident as she struggled to be heard and have action taken to protect the health of her students and staff. I heard the

anger she felt when she believed that superiors were not taking her seriously. And I heard the sense of despair that at times she felt powerless to change the situation.

I found that it was the perseverance of the principal, the stamina of the staff, and the strong partnerships with her parents that permeated Marilyn's succession year.

Marilyn fought a battle that year—a battle for the life of her campus. Often times, she felt as though she were battling alone. But the strength in her character and commitment to her school community shone through, and Marilyn was ultimately responsible for turning that haunting experience into a lesson, not only for her students, staff and parents, but the district as well.

Because of this unique and cataclysmic year, it is difficult to determine to what degree Marilyn's reactions and performance were results of the fact that she was a first year principal in AISD. It is hard to conceive that she would have done a better job had she not been new to the district. Perhaps Marilyn's performance was a result of a strong personality and a very capable professional. It seems likely that her experience would have been too much for a less capable individual.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS

This chapter reports the findings from questionnaires, focus groups, and case studies. It includes the emerging themes and responses to research questions. In the process of reviewing the data from the three data sources, I determined four themes of responses: 1) positive impacts ON the succession experience, 2) negative impacts on the succession experience, 3) insights learned by the succession principals, and 4) advice for other succession principals.

Positive Impacts on Succession Experiences

Positive experiences fell into four categories: 1) communication, 2) establishment of procedures and routines, 3) relationship building, and 4) learning district policies.

Communication

Responses relating to communication included: ongoing communication with Area Superintendents; Area meetings with vertical team principals; ongoing communication with staff; receipt of information regarding staff from former principal; sharing of experiences with peers; collaboration with others in development of programs to improve school operations; and acknowledgement of respect for school history, traditions, and culture.

Establishment of Procedures and Routines

Establishment of procedures and routines was vital to succession principals and responses included: monitoring implementation of the TEKS and preparation for TAAS; putting systems into place for textbooks, scheduling, safety drills, communication, and equipment organization; monitoring special education and bilingual education; and ensuring ongoing personal professional development through reading of journals, attendance at conferences and visiting other campuses.

Relationship Building

Relationship building provided positive experiences in a variety of ways, as the need for support for succession principals is great. Mentors, coaches, peer succession principals, veteran principals, parents, staff, and Area Superintendents positively impacted their succession experiences by validating their work and communicating regularly.

Knowledge of District Policies and Procedures

Gaining knowledge of district policies and procedures helped some succession principals have more positive experiences. Information shared by the district with these principals addressed guidance and counseling, budgeting, maintenance, grievance procedures, special programs, campus security, and curriculum.

Negative Impacts on Succession Experiences

Negative experiences fell into four categories: 1) effects of prior leadership of the school, 2) challenging relationships, 3) communication issues, and 4) lack of support from Central Office.

Effects of Prior Leadership

The effects of prior leadership of the school were found to be challenging to overcome and often forced succession principals to make quick and sometimes unpopular decisions. Included in this category were responses that addressed the circumstances under which the former principals left the campus; lack of hands-on leadership from former principals; inaccurate prior staff appraisals; former principals who ruled by fear causing distrust of the new administration; budgeting errors; and the lack of effective systems for such things as textbooks, budget, discipline, and communication.

Challenging Relationships

Challenging relationships profoundly affected the experiences of succession principals and were often the most difficult to overcome. Listed in this category were staff who were very loyal to the former principal; staff who openly opposed the succession principal; staff who challenged appraisals that did not mirror those by the former principal; staff who continually challenged decisions made by the succession

principal through the grievance process; assistant principals who undermined the succession principal; and interference from a teacher organization.

Challenging parent relationships stemmed from such things as: a lack of parent awareness of school programs and student needs; parents public opposition to the new principal who was named; and parents who met every weekend to attempt to find ways to get rid of the new principal.

Communication Issues

Communication issues also plagued succession principals. They most often related to the lack of time to share and discuss with other succession principals the challenges being faced and solutions to them; minimal communication with some mentors; and the inability to dialogue and reflect with other principals in administrative meetings. However, also noted were the inability to get timely and necessary information from the central office; concerns regarding just who they could trust and communicate with openly and honestly on their campuses; and fear of communicating to superiors what succession principals really felt regarding their experiences due to concerns of the ramifications of doing so.

Lack of Support From Central Office

Lack of support from the Central Office was seen as a very significant challenge by the succession principals. Issues included: not being advised of existing conditions of their campuses; not being advised of routine procedures; lack of support when dealing

with personnel issues, especially inept staff who had been moved from campus to campus rather than appropriately documented; lack of support when dealing with parent issues; lack of clear explanations relating to navigating the Central Office environment and negotiating the very political system; lack of district prioritization of mandated initiatives; lack of dialogue with principals regarding initiative implementation issues; lack of information regarding district grievance process; lack of timely receipt of critical information often causing last minute deadlines; placement of staff on campuses without the principal's approval; and the lack of support after the succession principals' first year as though leaving them to sink or swim.

Insights Gained by Succession Principals

As a result of their varied experience these succession principals gained numerous insights about themselves and their work. The responses fell into four categories: 1) self-awareness, 2) relationships 3) district politics, and 4) evidence of success.

Self-Awareness

These principals learned many things about themselves during their succession experiences. They included: becoming stronger as individuals and as campus leaders; the importance of staying focused on teaching and learning; and the awareness of the importance of one's health. Despite feelings of inadequacy, feeling that work was about

constantly fighting battles and putting out fires, and fighting the temptation to quit, these principals all came to realize that they were survivors.

Relationships

A deeper understanding of the significance of relationships was experienced by each of the case studies as well. Cited were: realizing the significance of relationships with peers; the benefit in calling others for advice; the need to learn whom to trust and whom not to trust; and the power of a strong relationship with the Area Superintendent.

District Politics

Understanding the political nature of AISD was also viewed as eye-opening as evidenced by responses addressing: the difficulty in navigating the Central Office bureaucracy; discovering that not everyone at Central could be trusted; and realizing that the Central Office had given a great deal of power to a teacher organization.

Evidence of Success

Succession principals also found that they could look to a variety of sources to evaluate their effectiveness during their succession experiences. These included TAAS data, AEIS ratings, teacher retention rates, administrative appraisals, parent surveys, and letters of support from parents and staff.

Advice for Other Succession Principals

The participants in the focus groups had numerous suggestions for other

succession principals which also fell into four categories: 1) knowledge of the job, 2)

communication, 3) relationship building, 4) establishment of priorities, and 5) personal

care.

Knowledge of the Job

Succession principals should have as much knowledge about their role as

possible. They should understand the political nature of the district and how to maneuver

in it; be aware of what is going on around them on their campuses; have a clear

understanding of the role of the principal and expectations of the district; learn about

personnel policies and procedures; have a good understanding of district initiatives

related to curriculum and instruction; use data to drive decision making; and know the

strengths and weaknesses of their staffs as well as themselves.

Communication

Once again communication was a critical component when it came to advice for

succession principals and included responses that addressed: asking questions for

information and advice; listening carefully; having conversations with all stake holders

before making major changes; knowing when collaboration is necessary and when it is

not; honoring the traditions and culture of the school; conversing honestly with staff

members regarding their performance; questioning before acting; knowing who can

answer questions; communicating regularly with staff, parents, and superiors; keeping a sense of humor; and being objective and analytical.

Relationship Building

Spending time building strong supportive relationships was also seen as important for succession principals and involves: having a good mentor; getting to know staff as quickly as possible; building relationships on and off campus; building strong relationships and friendships with other principals; calling on other principals as well as the Area Superintendent for advice; making connections with parents and staff; collaborating with those whose strengths can help resolve issues; learning who can be trusted and counted on; being aware of the motives of others; learning whom to trust and trusting those people; realizing the significance of the relationship with an assistant principal; and forging relationships with key people at the Central Office.

Establishment of Priorities

Many responses addressed the need to establish priorities. These included: know what is working and not working on the campus; pick your battles; hire and evaluate staff carefully; learn the sacred cows of the school culture; textbooks and budget are critical components to be assessed early; develop important systems that are lacking; make changes slowly and carefully; minimize major changes; and learn the grievance process early.

Personal Care

Advice for succession principals regarding personal care addressed: paying attention to one's health and family; building relationships outside of school; being aware of the demands and long hours of the principalship; and being one's self.

Summary

This chapter reports the findings from questionnaires, focus groups, and case studies. Four themes of responses emerged, each with its own sub categories of data.

Positive impacts on the succession experience included communication, the establishment of procedures and routines, relationship building, and learning district policies.

Negative impacts on the succession experience included the effects of the prior leadership of the school, challenging relationships, communication issues, and lack of support from Central Office.

Insights learned by the succession principals addressed self-awareness, relationships, district policies and evidence of success.

Advice for other succession principals included responses based on knowledge of the job, communication, relationship building, establishment of priorities, and personal care.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter VII is divided into four sections. It begins with a description of the purpose and design of the study. The second section provides a summary of the findings of the three research questions initially posed in this research. The third section contains conclusions derived from the findings. The fourth and final section contains recommendations for practice and further research.

Purpose and Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of elementary principals in the Austin Independent School District who recently succeeded other principals. Issues addressed included the principals' perceptions of the experiences themselves and the impact of those experiences on their effectiveness (what they were able to accomplish and what they were unable to accomplish according to their personal standards and goals and varying forms of documentation).

The design process began with a questionnaire that was distributed to 23 elementary principals who had succeeded other principals in the 1998 or 1999, and were still in those same schools in the 2001-2002 school year. Each respondent was asked to:

- Briefly describe your educational background experiences before assuming your current administrative role.

- Describe, in as much detail as possible, one of your most positive experiences during your succession year.

- Describe, in as much detail as possible, one of your most negative experiences during your succession year.

Each participant signed a consent form. Data collected from the respondents was reviewed. Based on responses to those questions and with attention to gender, ethnicity, and experience, fourteen principals were invited to participate in focus group sessions. Eight principals participated in one of two focus group sessions. Based on both written responses and focus group participation, three principals were invited to participate in the research as case studies to gain further answers to the research questions.

Summary of Findings

The summary of findings focuses on the answers to the three research questions proposed in this study.

1. *What has been the experience of a selected group of principals who recently succeeded other principals?*

Participants in this research had a variety of positive and negative experiences in their succession year. These experiences fell into a few basic categories. Cited as positive experiences, were examples related to communication and included communication with Area Superintendents, staff, peer principals, former principals, and community.

Another area of positive experiences related to the establishment of procedures and routines and included such responses as monitoring curriculum, assessment, budget, and special programs, as well as establishing systems for such things as textbooks,

communication, and scheduling. Attention to personal professional development supported positive experiences as well.

 Also key was the building of strong relationships with others such as mentors, peer principals, supervisors, parents and staff. These relationships were important sources of support for the succession principals.

Succession principals also cited gaining knowledge of district policies and procedures related to such areas as budget, maintenance, special programs, campus security, and curriculum as impacting positive experiences.

Succession principals also had negative examples to share. The lasting effects of prior school leadership often impacted negative experiences. Examples include opposite leadership style, inaccurate staff appraisals, budget errors, and lack of operational systems such as those for textbooks, budget, discipline, and communications.

Challenging relationships with staff reported in this category included examples of teachers who were resistant to changes that were implemented, outward signs of distrust and defiance of staff, anonymous "contempt mail" being left for the new principal, staff who refused to acknowledge the succession principal as the campus leader, staff members encouraging the intervention of a local teacher organization, and assistant principals who attempted to undermine the position of the succession principals.

Also reported were challenging relationships with parents who opposed the new principals or were unaware of school programs and student needs. While the numbers of parents varied, their voices were loud and far-reaching.

Communication issues also challenged succession principals and included such examples as lack of time to communicate with peer principals; minimal communication with some mentors; lack of time for dialogue in administrative meetings; lack of trust; fear of communicating concerns to superiors; and not receiving necessary information from the Central Office in a timely manner.

Lack of support from the Central Office was a very significant challenge faced by the succession principals. Examples included: not being advised of existing campus conditions; not being advised of routine practices and procedures; lack of support in dealing with parents and staff; lack of prioritization of district mandated initiatives; lack of clear explanations regarding roles and responsibilities; short deadlines; and lack of ongoing support for succession principals beyond the first year.

2. *What impact has this experience had upon their effectiveness as principals?*

The succession principals in this study gained insights in a number of areas including relationships, district policies and procedures, self-awareness, and looking at their evidence of success.

Principals found that these experiences impacted their effectiveness in a variety of ways. Most of the succession principals were fortunate to have mentor principals and support from other peer principals during their succession. Meetings with them

and also with Area Superintendents provided them with avenues and information for creating systems and programs that enhanced their effectives.

But they also had challenges as they attempted to make too many changes too quickly, found that teachers file grievances when they are unhappy, failed at creating strong working relationships with assistant principals, dealt with problems faced due to lack of effective leadership of former principals, and feared speaking the truth and dealing with ramifications of doing so.

However, despite the circumstances, the succession principals managed to be effective. Looking at TAAS scores, which were maintained or improved on all of their campuses, AEIS ratings which also were maintained or improved, staff retention, parent and staff surveys, and their administrative appraisals, it is evident that each of the participants in this research was effective in her/his role as the campus leader.

When asked about their effectiveness they gave responses including insight and awareness gained of district policies and procedures, development of inner strength, and development of significant relationships with peer principals and Area superintendents that all made them better principals.

3. *How can the succession process be improved to better facilitate principal succession?*

The participants in this study offered a variety of suggestions for improving the succession process. Each succession principal should be assigned an appropriate mentor with whom he/she should be given numerous opportunities to meet and reflect on their

work. Succession principals should also have time to meet, dialogue, and share

information with each other. There should be time in general principal meetings for

conversations among principals.

It was also recommended that the Central Office should respond quickly to

questions or request for support, as well as provide information early to succession

principals relating to budget, staffing, maintenance, and major district initiatives.

District initiatives should be prioritized and kept to a minimum. Succession principals

should be provided with clear role definitions and expectations. Due to the significance

of the relationship, it should be certain that the assistant principal is a good match.

It is important to realize that a succession principal requires ongoing support

from mentors, supervisors, and the Central Office beyond the initial succession year.

That support should continue for a minimum of two years.

Conclusions

I selected this research topic because of my own experiences as succession

principal. I was curious to know if my experiences were unique or in any way similar to

my peers. As I conducted the literature review, I had some sense that this phenomenon

of principal succession was a topic that was just recently coming forth as a topic of study

among researchers.

I was intrigued by the stories of succession principals, especially related to the

socialization process. Looking at the data in AISD related to principal retention, it was

clear that there was something that wasn't working. Learning what was taking place was

of significance to me, as I was losing peers and friends and was still in many ways, struggling with issues lingering from my own succession experience.

Fourteen principals provided data for this research in the form of written questionnaire responses, eight of them participated in focus groups and three of those served as case studies.

As I began to read the written responses and find common themes among the answers, I was eager to know what more I would find by conducting the focus group sessions and case studies. What I found was that the principals who participated in those sessions were eager to share their stories. While they did share things of a positive nature, the majority of the discussions in both groups dealt with challenges the principals had faced in their successions. In many cases these included the sadness, frustration, and even anger regarding the incidents that had so greatly impacted them. I found a group peers who were anxious to have their experiences validated and their thoughts heard.

The succession principals who participated in the focus groups and as case studies shared their experiences with me willingly and honestly. Listening to the tapes I am touched by the sincerity, the pain, the heartache, the distress, the loneliness that I hear. Their responses, when put into writing lose some of that impact. I think it is important to realize that the experiences of the succession principals had profound influence on their views not only of themselves, but also of the district itself.

It caused me to think about why these principals had survived the succession process and why they were still in their positions when others were not. I questioned what made them different and found myself saying that it had something to do with inner

strength and character. Not all succession principals have survived in this District for at least 2 years, and the issues they faced were no greater than those who did.

Principals who had worked in other districts, said that AISD was like no other district and that being a principal here was more challenging and stressful than their previous experiences. Perhaps that is one reason why the retention rate of principals in this district is lower than the retention rate of teachers in the district. AISD is a tough district in which to work. The demands on time and energy of succession principals are great. Deadlines are many and often on short timelines. Changes are made frequently and often without thorough explanation. The pressure to survive and survive well is often exhausting due to a lack of appropriate support systems in place.

And yet there are principals who still find it challenging to navigate the system but continue to stay in the District because they love what it once was, a place where people were valued and respected. They love the children, their staffs and the community. However, they, unlike other colleagues who had left AISD, were still in their positions attempting to keep their focus on doing good things for children despite those challenges. I have a great deal of respect for them. They are heroes in my book. In order to obtain and retain quality principals in the district, some challenges must be addressed.

First, we must to find ways to better nurture and support succession principals so that the positive impacts and experiences outweigh the negative. This can occur by forging strong effective relationships with Central Office staff, which are critical to the succession principal. When strong, open, powerful relationships are created, the

succession principal has clear expectations, is given direction, gets answers quickly, is not afraid to ask questions or to take risks, feels valued, and knows that in times of need, there will be support from the Central Office in resolving issues.

When that doesn't occur, the opposite is true. The succession principal does not know what is expected of her/him, receives little or no guidance or direction, struggles to get answers, is afraid to ask questions or take risks, does not feel valued by superiors, and feels that he/she will have to face challenges alone.

I discovered that many of the participants had the same underlying fear of speaking out about issues of concern regarding the Central Office. They had seen and felt retaliation for doing so in the past and were not eager to experience that again. But at the same time, they saw the need to speak up when things weren't right so that they could be corrected and that relationships between Central Office Administrators, with the exception of their Area Superintendents, could be restored and made more effective. This in turn would support them in being more effective in their roles as campus administrators.

Second, we must provide powerful ongoing support for succession principals. That comes in the form of mentors, time to dialogue with other principals frequently and regularly, supervisors whose leadership style promotes collaboration, and quick response to calls for support or assistance. Also significant is the consistent acknowledgement and validation of the work of the principals by Central Office. In addition, the support given to succession principals will not end just because they have made it through the first year. Without this support, principals will continue to be less than successful and

will more than likely have less than effective supportive relationships with staff and parents, and will leave.

Third, we must listen to those principals who have survived the succession experience and use what they have learned to support others in the succession process. Those survivors have much to offer regarding what works and what doesn't and what succession principals really need in addition to what is perceived that they need.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Practice in the Austin Independent School District

1. Provide each succession principal with a strong mentor and regular opportunities for dialogue for a minimum of two years.

2. Initiate a process for selecting, assigning, training, and supporting mentor principals.

3. Continue New Principal Training, but in addition to Central Office agendas, ask other recent succession principals for topics to address in those meetings.

4. Create a safe environment in which succession principals will feel free to ask questions or discuss sensitive district issues.

5. Re-evaluate the formal and informal power of the teacher organizations and their effect on campus morale and effectiveness of principals.

6.   Conduct a climate survey among principals to determine the satisfaction

rate of principals with their relationships with the Central Office in order

to best serve the campus leaders.

Recommendations for Further Study in the Austin Independent School District and

Other School Districts:

1.   Research the succession experiences of middle and high school

principals.

2.   Research the succession experiences of principals named from within the

district compared to those named from outside the district.

3.   Research the similarities and differences in succession experiences of

male and female principals.

4.   Research the impact of interactions of teacher organizations with campus

principals and the affect of those interactions on the effectiveness of the

campus leader.

5.   Research the rate of principal retention and its relationship to teacher

retention.

6.   Research the nature of the perception of retaliation beliefs among

principals and Central Office staff.

7.   Research and compare the experiences of succession principals in other

districts.

REFERENCES

Bennis, W. (1999). The secrets of great groups. In F. Hesselbein & P.M. Cohen (Eds.), *Leader to leader.* (pp. 315-322). San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass Publishers.

Blount, J. M. (1999). *W.W. II and the great gender realignment of school administration.* Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting Montreal, Quebec.

Bredesen, P. V. (1991). Reappraising personal experience in the preparation of school administrators. *Journal of School Leadership. 1* (2), 176-89.

Brock, B. L. & Grady, M. L. (1995). *Principals in transition: Tips for surviving succession.* Thousand Oaks CA: Corwin Press.

Conner, D. R. (1992). *Managing at the speed of change: How resilient managers succeed and prosper where others fail.* New York: Villard.

Daresh & Playko (1997). *Beginning the principalship: A practical guide for new school leaders.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Davis, S. H. (1998). Climbing the administrative ladder: Who goes up might come down. *NASSP Bulletin 82* (602), 49-59.

Day, C. (2000). Beyond transformational leadership. *Educational Leadership 57* (7), 56-59.

Deal, T. E. & Peterson, K. D. (1994). *The leadership paradox: Balancing logic and artistry in schools.* San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass Publications.

DuFour, R. (2002). The learning centered principal. *Educational Leadership 59* (8), 12-16.

Elmore, R. F. (2002,) Hard questions about practice. *Educational Leadership 59* (8), 22-25.

Erlandson, D. A. (1994)*. Building a career: Fulfilling the lifetime professional needs of principals.* Fairfax, VA: National Policy Board for Educational Administration.

Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Fairholm, G. W. (1994). Leading diverse followers. *The Journal of Leadership Studies 11* (4), 82-93.

Fauske, J. R. & Ogawa, R. T. (1987). Detachment, fear, and expectation: A faculty's response to the impending succession of its principal. *Educational Administration Quarterly 23* (2), 23-44.

Firestone, W. A. (1990). Succession and bureaucracy: Gouldner revisited. *Educational Administration Quarterly 26* (4), 345-375.

Fullan, M. (2002). The change leader. *Educational Leadership 59* (8), 16-20.

Glanz, J. (2002). *Finding your leadership style: A guide for educators.* Alexandria, VA. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Glickman, C. D. (2002). The courage to lead. *Educational Leadership 59* (8), 41-44.

Hall , G. E. & Mani, M. N. G. (1992). Entry strategies: Where do I begin? In F. W. Parkay & G. E. Hal (Eds.), *Becoming a principal: The challenges of beginning leadership.* (pp. 48-67). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Hart, A. W. (1991). Leader succession and socialization: A synthesis. *Review of Educational Research 61* (4), 451-474.

Hart, A. W. (1993). *Principalship succession: Establishing leadership in schools.* Albany, NY: State of New York Press.

Hart, A. W. & Bredeson, P. V. (1996). *Principalship: A theory of professional learning and practice.* New York: McGraw Hill.

Heller, D. A. (2002). The power of gentleness. *Educational Leadership 59* (8), 76-79.

Holman. L. J. (1996). Congratulations on your promotion! Now what? *Principal 76* (1)*,* 40-41.

Hoy, W. K. & Miskel, C. G. (1994). *Educational administration: Theory, research and practice.* New York: McGraw Hill.

Hoyle, J. R. (1995). *Leadership and futuring: Making visions happen.* Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin Press. Inc.

Hoyle, J. R. (2002). *Leadership and the force of love: Six keys to motivation with love.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Irby, B. & Brown, G. (1995). Perceptions of women aspiring to administrative positions. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin,* Summer, 33-38.

Jean, E. & Evans, R. D. (1995). *Internships/mentorships for first-year principals: Implications for administrative certifications and graduate program design.* Helena, MD. Montana State Board of Education (Eric Document Reproduction Services No. Ed 390 805)

Kouzes, J. M. (1999). Finding your leadership voice. In F. Hesselbein & P.M. Cohen (Eds.), *Leader to leader.* (pp. 37-42). San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass Publishers.

LeGore, J. A. & Parker, L. (1997). First year principal succession: A study of leadership, role, and change. *Journal of School Leaderhip 7,* 369-385.

Leithwood, K. Steinbach, R. & Begley, P. (1992). Socialization experiences: Becoming a principal in Canada. In F. W. Parkay & G. E. Hal (Eds.), *Becoming a principal: The challenges of beginning leadership.* (pp. 284-307). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

McMillan, R. B. (1994). *New principals' experiences with leadership: Crossing the cultural boundary.* Paper presented at the International Programme in Educational Administration. Toronto & Ontario Canada & Buffalo NY.

Maxwell, J. C. (1993). *Developing the leader within you.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Ogawa, R. T. & Hart, A. W. (1985). The effect of principals on the instructional performance of schools. *Journal of Educational Administration 23* (1) 59-72.

Osterman, K. F., Crow, G. M., Rosen, J. L. (1997). New urban principals: Role conceptions at the entry level. *Urban Education 322* (3), 373-93.

Osterman, K. F. & Sullivan, S. (1994, April). *Principals in an urban bureaucracy: The first years.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New Orleans, LA.

Osterman, K. F. & Sullivan, S. (1996). New principals in an urban bureaucracy: A sense of efficacy. *Journal of School Leadership 6* (6), 611-692.

Parkay, F. W. & Currie, G. (1992). Sources of support for the beginning principal. In F. W. Parkay & G. E. Hall (Eds.), *Becoming a principal: The challenges of beginning leadership.* (pp. 70-84). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Parkay, F. W., Currie, G. D. & Rhodes, J. W. (1992). Professional socialization: A longitudinal study of first-time high school principals. *Educational Administration Quarterly 28* (1), 43-75.

Parkay, F. W. & Hall, G. E. (1992). *Becoming a principal: The challenges of beginning leadership.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Peters, T. (1999). *The circle of innovation: You can't shrink your way to greatness.* New York: Vintage Books. (p 468).

Ramsey, R. D. (1999). *Lead, follow or get out of the way: How to be a more effective leader in today's schools.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Ripley, D. (1997). *Current tensions in the principalship: Finding an appropriate balance. NAASP Bulletin 81* (585), 55-64.

Roberts, J. (1992a). Building the school culture. In F. W. Parkay & G. E. Hal (Eds.), *Becoming a principal: The challenges of beginning leadership.* (pp. 85-101). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Roberts, J. (1992b). Mary: A self-reliant survivor. In F. W. Parkay & G. E. Hal (Eds.), *Becoming a principal: The challenges of beginning leadership.* (pp. 169-182). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Roberts, J. & Wright, L. V. (1992). Initiating change. In F. W. Parkay & G. E. Hal (Eds.), *Becoming a principal: The challenges of beginning leadership.* (pp. 123-139). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Shakeshaft, C. (1989). *Women in educational administration.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

APPENDIX A

RESPONSES TO FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

RESPONSES TO FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

What processes did you initiate that facilitated your success as a principal?

- Listening

- Honoring succeeded principals

- Ongoing communication with staff

- Establishment of procedures for textbooks, bilingual education, special education, scheduling, keys, safety drills

- Monitoring implementation of the TEKS and monitoring TAAS.

- Collaboration with staff and Central Office to design programs that would improve the overall operation of the school

- Being at school from 5:30 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.

- Ongoing communication with Area Superintendent

What processes did others initiate that facilitated your success as a principal?

- Mentors and coaches for new principals

- Meetings with peer principals

- Area meetings with vertical team principals

- Previously established procedures for textbooks, communication, Limited English Proficient (LEP), and equipment organization

What processes did you initiate that harmed your success as a principal?

- Making changes too quickly

- Trying to do things alone

- Failed attempts at creating strong relationships with assistant principals

- Raising the bar in the area of academic expectations for students and professional expectations of staff led to time and energy consuming grievances

- Fear of speaking the truth and ramifications of doing so

What processes did others initiate that harmed your success as a principal?

- Lack of hands-on leadership from the previous two principals

- Lack of effective systems in placed for textbooks, budget, discipline, communication

- Inaccurate former staff appraisals

- Inept teachers moved from campus to campus

- Former administrators who ruled by fear causing distrust of new administration

- Lack of support from Central Office in dealing with personnel issues

- Lack of time for succession principals to meet and share common issues

- Lack of time for dialogue and refection among principals in administrative meetings

- Uncertainty in navigating and negotiating the Central Office environment

- Getting timely answers from questions to various departments at the Central Office

- Adding all of the district initiatives into already full schedules and lack of dialogue with those expected to implement changes on their campuses before decisions are made

- Lack of prioritization of district initiatives and mandates

- Lack of clear role definitions and expectations

- Budgeting issues that plague new and existing principals

- Placement of an assistant principal on the campus

- Lack of district and that the initial support goes away after first year, leaving principals to sink or swim.

What would you change about the timing of your processes?

- Ask more questions of the Area Superintendent regarding Central Office procedures.

- Devote more time to the selection of some staff members.

- Make some staffing changes that were in the best interest of the children earlier.

- Have more conversations with staff members challenged with the accountability standards and change in instructional programs.

- Differentiate between when collaboration is necessary and is not.

- Listen more to concerns and develop a system for listening to them.

- Minimize major changes at the onset.

- Spend more time developing relationships.

- Slow down.

- Learn which staff members could really be trusted.

What information did you receive that facilitated your success?

- To respect the school's history, traditions, and culture

- To spend time in getting to know people; build relationships with staff and parents

- Information of such things as the guidance program, campus security, and curriculum shared by district staff

- Grievance process and legal statutes associated with personnel issues

- Important information about staff, including who to trust, shared by former principal

- Direction on budget, maintenance, special programs, and guidance and counseling.

What information did you wish that you had received?

- Knowing who to trust

- What had been happening at the campus in the preceding year

- Why the former principal left

- How to understand the BTO

- More timely information from Central Office regarding major changes in the district

- How to utilize the office phone system

- Procedures for incoming principals to could get offices repainted or furniture replaced at a fraction of the cost

- Understanding the budget process

- Who would and who would not support the new principal

- More about the grievance process

- More about the staffs' relationships with former principals

- How to deal with parents who openly protested the arrival of the new principal

What helped you the most during your first year?

- My Area Superintendent telling me in a difficult time, that he believed in me

- Meeting with peers and sharing experiences

- An Area Superintendent who defended the principal's concern regarding her campus

- Peers who told me they were there for me

- Attending state and national conferences

- Visiting with principal colleagues

- Reading educational journals

- Visiting other campuses

- Relationship with co-principals

- Monthly Area Meetings

What advice would you give to a succession principal?

- Get a good mentor and communicate with he/him regularly.

- Get to know your staff and your parents right away.

- Do a lot of listening.

- Find out who's who at Central and know who to call for what.

- Be prepared to spend long hours at work.

- Be yourself.

- Don't be afraid to ask questions.

- Collaborate with others regarding major decisions on your campus.

- Learn whom you can trust and trust them.

- Evaluate staff appropriately.

- Learn to prioritize.

- Treat people fairly.

- Get a handle on budget and textbooks early.

- Honor the work done before you.

- Know the sacred cows regarding your school culture.

- Take care of yourself, your health, and your family.

- Know the grievance process.

- Learn about legal statutes related to personnel issues.

- Develop systems that are lacking on your campus

- Find someone you admire. Spend time with them away from your campus regularly.

- Build relationships on and off your campus.

- Hire wisely.

- Don't try to change too much your first year, but do change what you need to change.

- Take a good look at what is working on your campus.

- Find someone you can count on.

- Pick your battles.

- Never underestimate the significance of your relationship with your Assistant Principal.

APPENDIX B

RESPONSES TO CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

RESPONSES TO CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

How did your experience in your succession year impact your perception of your performance as a principal?

- At times there were feelings of inadequacy.

- Sometimes I wanted to quit.

- It was hard to stay focused on teaching and learning.

- I felt as though I was fighting a continuous battle.

What data have you utilized to determine your effectiveness as a succession principal and what does that data tell you?

- TAAS Data

- Teacher Retention

- Administrative Appraisals

- Parent Surveys

- AEIS Ratings

- Letters of support from staff

- Letters of support from parents

What support systems were in place that helped your succession experience?

- Communication and support from the Area Superintendent

- Staying focused on the need of students

- Area Principals' Meetings

- Parent support

- Staff support

What hindered your succession experience?

- Lack of cooperation from the Central Office

- Interference from teacher organization

- Lack of parent support

- Lack of staff support

- Lack of experience and knowledge of procedures

How did your succession experience affect you as a person?

- I gained an awareness of legal policies.

- I gained an awareness of grievance policies.

- My health suffered and has not been the same since

- I got stronger.

- I became a better principal.

How did your experience affect your relationships with your peers?

- Peer relationships were critical.

- Very strong bonds of friendship were formed.

- People called for advice.

What did you learn about yourself and the district from your experience?

- I am a survivor.

- I learned who to trust and who not to trust.

- A small group of people can make a lot of noise and get a lot of attention.

- It is very difficult to navigate the Central Office bureaucracy.

- This job is very political.

- Central Office gives the teacher organization more power than it should have.

What advice would you give to a succession principal facing similar situations?

- Don't ignore what is going on around you.

- If you are not sure what to say, don't say anything.

- Acknowledge that you have heard what has been said, but wait until you are 100% sure of what you want to say.

- Investigate and know all possible connections that are underlying people's motives.

- Just because someone has a title in the district, it doesn't mean that you can trust her/him.

- This job is political and some people will be more concerned about themselves than others.

- Let the results speak for themselves.

- Create your own circumstances.

- Question everything: be sure that you are clear before you step out on a limb.

- Your job is to do good things for kids, not to have people like you.

- Ask yourself, "Am I doing what is good for kids?"

- Ask yourself, "Am I asking anyone to do anything unethical?"

- Don't be afraid to ask for help or support. Pick up the phone and call right away.

- Know your staff, especially those for whom change is almost like losing a limb.

- Be true to yourself, but also know yourself and your weaknesses and strengths.

- Know the strengths and weaknesses of your staff.

- Keep an emotionally healthy workplace by communicating.

- Be objective and analytical.

- Know who in the organization can help you answer questions.

- Ask for people to bring their strengths to help get you closer to resolution.

- A good sense of humor is essential.

- Make connections with people.

VITA

Brenda Anne Russell Berry
1202 Pine Portage Loop
Leander, Texas 78641

EDUCATION
     B.S. Home Economics Education   Southwest Texas State University, 1971
     M.Ed. Educational Administration   Southwest Texas State University, 1991
     Ed.D. Educational Administration   Texas A&M University, 2004

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
     1998-2003   Principal, Graham Elementary School, Austin ISD
     1997-1998   Assistant Principal, Widen Elementary School, Austin ISD
     1994-1997   Principal, Anderson-Shiro Elementary School, Anderson-Shiro ISD
     1991-1994   Assistant Principal, Madisonville Elementary School, Madisonville ISD
     1988-1991   Teacher, Poteet Elementary School, Poteet ISD
     1987-1988   Business Consultant, Self Employed
     1985-1987   Business Consultant, Neil Corporation
     1982-1985   Enrollment Manager, Werner Erhardt & Associates,
     1977-1982   Service Representative, South Western Bell Telephone
     1973-1976   Teacher, Canadian High School, Canadian ISD

EDUCATOR CERTIFICATIONS
     Superintendent
     Mid-Management Administrator (Grades PK-12)
     Elementary Self-Contained (Grades 1-8)
     Early Childhood Education (Grades PK-K)
     Vocational Home Economics (Grades 6-12)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS
     Austin Association of Public School Administrators
         Member of Executive Board 2003-2004
         President and Chair of Consultation Team 2000-2003
         Member of Executive Board and Consultation Team 1998-2000
     Texas Elementary Principals Association
     Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development
     Phi Delta Kappa