

# The Pain Outweighs the Gain: Why Teachers Don't Want to Become Principals

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*U.S. schools are facing a crisis of leadership because many school districts are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit new principals. Whereas teachers represent the group from which the largest number of new principals is likely to be drawn, fewer and fewer of them now seem willing to seek administrative positions. Understanding their perspectives provides an important basis for addressing critical shortages. Using survey data from a large Ohio sample, the present study examined the views of teachers with regard to what are commonly perceived as incentives and disincentives associated with the principalship. It also explored the characteristics of teachers that make them more and less receptive to the idea of seeking leadership positions. Results showed that, in general, teachers view the disincentives associated with the principalship as more potent than the incentives. Variables that were significantly associated with the view that the principalship was "worth it" (i.e., that the incentives outweighed the disincentives) included gender (i.e., maleness), administrative licensure, and the tendency to value the practice whereby school leaders groom teachers for leadership positions.*

## BACKGROUND

According to numerous commentators, school districts in many U.S. states are facing a crisis of leadership. These school districts are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit highly qualified new principals, while, at the same time, record numbers of school administrators are now reaching retirement age (Cooley & Shen, 1999; Education Research Service [ERS], 1998; Fenwick & Pierce, 2001; Hammond, Muffs, & Sciascia, 2001; Tracy & Weaver, 2000; but cf. Roza, 2003). Whereas teachers represent the group from which the largest number of new principals is likely to be drawn (Enwall & Fabal, 1998; ERS, 1998), fewer and fewer of them now seem willing to seek administrative positions (Cooley & Shen, 1999; ERS, 1998; Hammond et al., 2001; Kerrins, Johnstone, & Cushing, 2001; Pounder & Merrill, 2001a; Tracy & Weaver, 2000). Given these circumstances, educators and policymakers need to understand how teachers view the

organizational and political dynamics associated with contemporary school administration. Despite this need, few empirical studies have addressed the issue.

The present study, therefore, examined the views of teachers with regard to what are commonly perceived as incentives and disincentives associated with the principalship. Representative random samples of two groups of teachers were included: (a) teachers who did not hold administrative licensure and (b) teachers who did hold such licensure. The study addressed six research questions:

- Which incentives do teachers perceive to be most salient to the decision to seek (or not to seek) a position as school principal?
- Which disincentives do teachers perceive to be most salient to the decision to seek (or not to seek) a position as school principal?
- To what extent and in what ways do teachers who hold administrative licensure differ from those who do not in their perceptions of the incentives and disincentives associated with the principalship?
- To what extent do teachers' characteristics influence their perceptions of the incentives and disincentives associated with the principalship?
- To what extent do characteristics of the school districts in which teachers work influence their perceptions of the incentives and disincentives associated with the principalship?
- To what extent does the leadership of administrators in their districts influence teachers' perceptions of the incentives and disincentives associated with the principalship?

#### RELATIONSHIP OF THE STUDY TO RELATED LITERATURE

This study fits in with and expands research efforts that have explored the working conditions that characterize positions in school administration. In general, this line of inquiry has demonstrated that many educators are reluctant to pursue administrative positions because of the demands of the job, the increased pressure to show "results," and the inadequate remuneration (e.g., Cooley & Shen, 2000; Gewertz, 2000; Houston, 1998, 2000). Those who hold administrative positions, however, report that one of their greatest sources of satisfaction is the ability to make a difference (Wesson & Grady, 1993).

The study adds to this literature in three ways. First, it provides a large-scale analysis of teachers' perspectives on the opportunities and challenges associated with the principalship. Much of the previous research on

teachers' perspectives about administrative positions has focused on relatively small and localized samples, often of graduate students in administrator preparation programs. Second, it compares the perspectives of teachers who have demonstrated some interest in the principalship (i.e., by becoming licensed as principals) with perspectives of teachers who have not demonstrated a similar level of interest. Finally, unlike most of the other related research, this study explores the variables that affect the extent to which teachers find incentives and disincentives associated with the principalship salient to their decision making with regard to a career move into administration.

#### PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHERS' STANCE WITH REGARD TO A CAREER IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

The shrinking pool of aspiring principals is the central theme in a recent body of descriptive and normative literature on school administration (e.g., Cooley & Shen, 1999; Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001; Pounder & Merrill, 2001a, 2001b; Tracy & Weaver, 2000; Whitaker, 2001). Researchers have addressed the issue from both administrator-oriented and teacher-oriented perspectives, with much greater attention thus far devoted to the views of practicing school leaders.

In much of the current literature, researchers have summarized data elicited from school superintendents and principals (e.g., ERS, 1998; Kerrins et al., 2001; Malone, Sharp, & Walter, 2001; Whitaker, 2001; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). Some studies, however, have adopted a more inclusive approach, integrating teachers into their samples in order to complement findings obtained from school administrators (Adams, 1999; Hammond et al., 2001; Malone, Sharp, & Thompson, 2000). Researchers who have focused more or less exclusively on the perspectives of concerned current administrators tend to emphasize the impact that the negative aspects of the principalship exerts on teachers.

Researchers who also consider the perspective of teachers (e.g., Pounder & Merrill, 2001a) paint a more complicated picture, portraying teachers as agents who contemplate a career in administration in terms of its perceived level of attraction. In other words, these researchers regard teachers as individuals who weigh both the benefits and limitations of the principalship carefully before making definitive choices about whether or not to make a career move. The body of empirical literature prioritizing teachers' perspective on school administration likewise argues that the degree of readiness of potential principals depends on their ability to strike a suitable balance between their expectations and misgivings (Cooley & Shen, 1999; Enwall & Fabal, 1998; Malone et al., 2001; Winter, Rinehart, & Munoz, 2001).

## THE FOCUS ON DISINCENTIVES

Several studies conclude that teachers, even those who hold certificates as principals, steer clear of the principalship because of perceived difficulties and frustrations associated with the job. As early as 1994, Jordan, McCauley, and Comeaux (1994) surveyed teachers who held administrator certification in southwestern Louisiana and reported that more than 80% professed no interest in the principalship. Teachers ranked the disincentives associated with the principalship in the following order: the profession is growing significantly more complex and constraining; it is a source of considerable stress; principals lack the means and support for doing a good job; the salary is too low; daily and yearly hours are too long; and finally, family life suffers from the demands of the position. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted in California (Adams, 1999) and in one conducted in Indiana (Malone et al., 2001).

In a New York state study that also noted these same disincentives, an important additional disincentive surfaced, namely, the perception that hiring practices tend to privilege certain individuals over others on the basis of their gender or ethnic identity (Hammond et al., 2001). The authors noted that the four-to-one success ratio of male applicants in New York confirmed the relevance of this disincentive. Hammond and associates (2001) also referred to the stressful demands of public accountability and conflict management as lesser causes for concern for would-be principals.

These and other stresses of the principal's job appear to be salient for even those teachers who hold administrative certification. In a comparison of the perspectives of principal-certified educators in a large urban school district in the Midwest, Winter, Rinehart, and Munoz (2001) found that, unlike assistant principals, principal-certified teachers and administrative workers (e.g., guidance counselors, coordinators) were ambivalent about the desirability of a job as principal. These educators were concerned about loss of tenure, the degradation of family life, and a stressful workload aggravated by reduced vacation time. They also identified satisfaction with their current work conditions as a major deterrent. Nevertheless, these educators acknowledged that the principalship did offer the prospect of more power, better opportunities for personal and professional development, and more money. The researchers also noted that potential applicants who expressed interest in jobs in school administration reported significantly more self-confidence in their ability to meet the particular challenges of a principal's position than did respondents who expressed less interest in such jobs.

## THE FOCUS ON INCENTIVES

Whereas many studies focused attention on educators' perceptions of the disincentives associated with the principalship, a few focused on the

incentives. One study (Malone et al., 2001) collected data from practicing and prospective principals to illuminate the positive features of school administration. Findings from the study showed that prospective school administrators most often wanted to enter the principalship in order to “make a difference for kids” and to “influence the direction their schools were taking.”

Also interested primarily in positive features of school administration, Enwall and Fabal (1998) investigated the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that drive teachers to identify themselves as applicants for the principalship. Unlike Malone and associates (2001), however, Enwall and Fabal focused on the experiences of female respondents only. Relying on anecdotal data from teachers and principals at different stages of their careers, the authors divided the motivating factors cited by their respondents into “good” and “bad” reasons for seeking the principalship.

According to the researchers, most good reasons drew on intrinsic motivations, such as those reflected in the following comments from respondents: “I am ready for more responsibility”; “I want a new challenge to expand my horizons”; “I have many good ideas, and I want a chance to use them” (Enwall & Fabal, 1998, p. 28). The researchers also included financial incentives on their list of good reasons for pursuing jobs in school administration. As the researchers noted, a principal’s salary serves as an intrinsic motivator for many women because it highlights and reinforces their independent status and level of professional achievement. “Bad reasons” for pursuing the principalship, according to these researchers, included motives grounded in the need for power as well as those based on the misguided belief that school administration is easier than teaching.

Another study that based its analysis on themes derived from respondents involved a survey of 189 students in education leadership at a Midwestern university (Cooley & Shen, 1999). The survey elicited information about the crucial factors that teachers typically consider when evaluating the soundness of a specific job offer. Cooley and Shen (1999) identified 10 local and universal factors informing teacher decision making in regard to administrative positions within particular contexts. According to the researchers, the degree of fulfillment of these “wants and needs” helps potential candidates assess the relative “health” of the societal and organizational conditions surrounding a particular position. Participants in the study claimed that they paid special attention to the following issues (Cooley & Shen, 1999, pp. 75–80):

1. the relationship among the board, administration, and teachers;
2. salary commensurate with responsibility;
3. community support;

4. quality of life in the community (e.g., housing, cultural activities, recreation);
5. impact of the administrative position on home life;
6. reputation of the superintendent;
7. location of the district;
8. emotional aspects (e.g., stress, boredom, frustration, burnout, lack of fulfillment);
9. evidence of poor working conditions (e.g., too much paperwork, long hours, little time or freedom); and
10. nature of the work (e.g., relationships with parents and students).

#### CONSENSUS AND GAPS IN THE EXTANT EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

According to a dominant modern myth, a school principal is an underpaid workhorse juggling the conflicting demands of instructional leadership, bureaucracy, official mandates, and adverse interest groups (Fenwick & Pierce, 2001). Research confirms that teachers typically are aware of the challenges offered by the profession of school administration and therefore show an increasing reluctance to embrace it. The same core reasons are repeatedly mentioned by teacher respondents: complex and extremely time-consuming responsibilities, the lack of compensation for after-school and weekend duties, the deterioration of the quality of family life brought about by the heavy workload of the principal, isolation from and conflict with different educational constituents, and finally, the physically and psychologically draining effects of trying to address multiple contradictory expectations with limited resources.

Opinions differ as to the extent of the influence that disincentives exercise on the behaviors of potential principals. Proponents of an employer-oriented outlook on the “crisis” of administrative shortages assume that teachers primarily seek their personal well-being both in the workplace and in the private sphere. From their standpoint, teachers add up the minuses of school administration until the latter reach a critical mass that makes the prospect of a principalship sound definitely unattractive. By contrast, a teacher-oriented perspective portrays teachers as professionals who willingly contemplate making personal trade-offs in order to accede to the more idealistic rewards offered by school administration. Disincentives therefore represent only the downside of the multiple factors that enter into the decision making of potential principals.

A very limited proportion of current literature shares the latter outlook on the factors influencing teachers’ decisions to pursue administrative

careers, although this outlook is more comprehensive. Furthermore, almost no research to date has compared the relative importance of incentives and disincentives to different groups of teachers, nor has that research examined the conditions contributing to the ways teachers view such incentives and disincentives. Although based on data from one state only, the current study builds on and expands the extant literature by attempting to fill these gaps.

## METHODS

In order to assess teachers' perceptions about the incentives and disincentives associated with the principalship as a career move, we developed a questionnaire with items drawn from the relevant literature on the opportunities and challenges of school administration. We shared a draft of the instrument with our research advisory board—a group of 12 school administrators and four university faculty members—who suggested that we revise the wording of several of the items and include several additional items. Because most of the items had been used previously on a questionnaire mailed to principals, we had evidence of adequate reliability of the scales and did not, therefore, pilot test the instrument.<sup>1</sup> (The instrument is provided in the appendix.)

We mailed the questionnaire to two random samples of teachers in Ohio, drawn from the universe of teachers employed in Ohio during the 2000–2001 school year.<sup>2</sup> The first sample included 1,000 teachers who held the administrative license, and the second included 1,056 teachers who did not hold the license. In order to maximize return rates, we mailed the questionnaire three times at 1-week intervals. Despite these efforts, return rates were not as high as we had hoped. Although we would have liked to conduct telephone follow-ups to encourage teachers to complete and return questionnaires, timing and funding problems interfered. We had mailed the questionnaires at the end of March, and by the time we realized that we did not have an adequate return rate, most schools had already dismissed for summer break. Funding cuts to the project resulting from budget problems in Ohio also imposed constraints.

One of the researchers on the team entered all data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 11.0 data entry module, and a second researcher checked all of the database entries for accuracy. Cases with missing data were omitted from the analyses. Since there was a considerable amount of missing data on items comprising the scale, we also used the SPSS missing-data module to substitute series means for missing values on these items. Reanalyses using the expanded data set revealed the same patterns of influence as were evident in the original analyses.<sup>3</sup>

## RESULTS

We received usable responses from 435 teachers who held the administrative license and from 433 who did not (return rates of 44% and 41%, respectively). Of those who returned questionnaires, 68.6% were female, and 31.4% were male. The average age was 44, the average years as a teacher was 17.9, and the average years in the current job was 10.3. Of the respondents, 44.2% had coached an athletic team at some point in their career, but 55.8% had not. With respect to marital status, 76.9% of the teachers were married, with 11.8% single, 8.6% divorced, and 1.6% widowed. Approximately 49% were responsible for pre-college-aged children, and 13.2% were responsible for the care of elderly relatives.

In terms of the grade levels at which they taught, 6.4% of the teachers taught prekindergarten or kindergarten, 29.1% taught in grades 1–4, 30% taught in grades 5–8, 34.4% taught in grades 9–12, and 0.1% taught adults. The teachers showed only a small amount of variability in the highest degrees held, with the majority (71.7%) holding the master's degree. Among the remainder, 16.5% held the bachelor's as their highest degree, 9.6% held the educational specialist, and 2.2% held the doctorate.

The locales of the schools in which teachers worked were represented in the following proportions: 30.7% were rural, 41.3% were suburban, and 28% were urban. The average school enrollment was 693 ( $SD = 465$ ).

Because of the low return rate, we compared teachers in our sample with those in Ohio overall. In comparison with teachers in the state, those in the sample were less likely to be female. Whereas the percentage of female teachers in the sample was 68.6%, the state percentage in 2002–03 was 72.6% (Ohio Department of Education, 2004). Teachers in the sample also tended to be somewhat more experienced than those in the state, in which, in 2002–03, the mean for years of experience was 13.38 ( $SD = 4.3$ ). We were unable to make other comparisons because state-level data were unavailable.

## SALIENCE OF INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES

We constructed two scales, one encompassing all of the items related to incentives associated with the principalship and the other encompassing all of the items related to the disincentives. The scales had high internal consistency, with alpha reliabilities of .9 for the incentives scale and .87 for the disincentives scale. A paired-samples  $t$  test revealed that teachers saw disincentives as significantly more salient than incentives ( $t = -9.6$ ,  $p \leq .0001$ ). The mean score on the 4-point incentives scale was 2.4 ( $SD = 0.63$ ), and the mean score on the 4-point disincentives scale was 2.7 ( $SD = 0.54$ ). A comparison of item means (with all items presented as 4-point Likert scales) revealed that the five most salient incentives were

anticipated satisfaction of “making a difference” as a principal (mean = 2.64,  $SD = 0.98$ ), ability to affect the lives of a greater number of children (mean = 2.63,  $SD = 0.97$ ), opportunity as a principal to implement creative personal ideas (mean = 2.62,  $SD = 0.93$ ), chance to have a greater impact as a principal (mean = 2.61,  $SD = 0.97$ ), and improved annual salary as a principal (mean = 2.51,  $SD = 0.95$ ). This analysis also revealed that the five most salient disincentives were anticipated stress about having less time at home with family members (mean = 3.2,  $SD = 0.97$ ); anticipated stress associated with having to “play politics” (mean = 3.19,  $SD = 0.17$ ); principals’ increased responsibility for local, state, and federal mandates (mean = 3.09,  $SD = 0.94$ ); accountability for societal conditions beyond an educator’s control (mean = 2.93,  $SD = 1.00$ ); and decreased opportunity to work with children directly (mean = 2.91,  $SD = 0.99$ ).

We also calculated subgroup means and standard deviations for scores on the incentives and disincentives scales. To make comparisons on the basis of characteristics measured by continuous variables (e.g., years of teaching experience), we split the data into two groups at the median and then calculated means and standard deviations for the higher and lower groups. Comparisons were provided for groups reflecting every independent variable included in the regression models used to identify predictors of scores on the incentives and disincentives scales (see Tables 1 and 2).

#### VARIABLES INFLUENCING THE SALIENCE OF INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES

In order to determine the effects of teachers’ characteristics, school context, and school administration approaches on teachers’ perceptions of the salience of incentives and disincentives associated with the position of principal, we constructed two multiple-regression equations, with independent variables entered in blocks. First, we entered a block of variables related to teachers’ personal characteristics (i.e., gender, years as a teacher, highest degree earned, coaching experience, localist values,<sup>4</sup> and cosmopolitan values<sup>5</sup>). Second, we entered variables relating to school context (i.e., locale, school size, free- and reduced-price-lunch rates, building level). Finally, we entered variables relating to the school’s administration characteristics (i.e., the perceived leadership style of the principal and the perceived importance of encouragement from school leaders).

With regard to incentives, the first block of variables explained 15% of the variance, the second block contributed nothing additional to explaining the variance, and the third block contributed an additional 13%. The adjusted  $r^2$  for the entire equation was .28. Among the independent variables, those that provided a significant contribution were years as a teacher, cosmopolitan values, licensure as a school administrator, and perception of the

**Table 1. Group comparisons: Incentives scale**

| Variable                         | Groups               | Mean | Standard deviation | <i>n</i> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|------|--------------------|----------|
| Gender                           | Male                 | 2.51 | 0.61               | 243      |
|                                  | Female               | 2.42 | 0.64               | 531      |
| Years as teacher                 | Higher               | 2.43 | 0.63               | 387      |
|                                  | Lower                | 2.49 | 0.63               | 227      |
| Highest degree                   | BA                   | 2.34 | 0.64               | 129      |
|                                  | MA                   | 2.44 | 0.63               | 546      |
|                                  | Specialist           | 2.53 | 0.54               | 80       |
|                                  | Doctorate            | 2.54 | 0.62               | 18       |
| Coaching experience              | Yes                  | 2.46 | 0.59               | 352      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.43 | 0.65               | 430      |
| Localism                         | Higher               | 2.41 | 0.65               | 308      |
|                                  | Lower                | 2.47 | 0.61               | 463      |
| Cosmopolitanism                  | Higher               | 2.57 | 0.63               | 366      |
|                                  | Lower                | 2.32 | 0.61               | 401      |
| Administrative licensure         | Yes                  | 2.54 | 0.57               | 388      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.34 | 0.67               | 389      |
| Rural                            | Yes                  | 2.42 | 0.62               | 235      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.43 | 0.64               | 536      |
| Urban                            | Yes                  | 2.49 | 0.63               | 215      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.42 | 0.63               | 556      |
| School enrollment                | Higher               | 2.46 | 0.66               | 373      |
|                                  | Lower                | 2.43 | 0.60               | 415      |
| School level                     | Preschool-Elementary | 2.44 | 0.62               | 257      |
|                                  | Middle               | 2.44 | 0.64               | 215      |
|                                  | Secondary-Adult      | 2.45 | 0.62               | 260      |
| Free and reduced-price lunch     | Higher               | 2.44 | 0.63               | 294      |
|                                  | Lower                | 2.42 | 0.63               | 287      |
| Laissez-faire principal          | Yes                  | 2.39 | 0.65               | 122      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.44 | 0.62               | 596      |
| Autocratic principal             | Yes                  | 2.42 | 0.60               | 160      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.44 | 0.63               | 558      |
| Democratic principal             | Yes                  | 2.46 | 0.64               | 543      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.42 | 0.62               | 175      |
| Encouragement from administrator | Yes                  | 2.71 | 0.51               | 302      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.28 | 0.64               | 486      |

importance of encouragement from school leaders (see Table 3). Teachers who had less experience, those whose values were more strongly cosmopolitan, those who held licensure as administrators, and those who perceived the encouragement of school leaders as important were more likely than other teachers to give high salience ratings to the incentives associated with the principalship.

With regard to disincentives, the equations explained less of the variance, with the total equation explaining a mere 4%. This small amount of

**Table 2. Group comparisons: Disincentives scale**

| Variable                         | Groups               | Mean | Standard deviation | <i>n</i> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|------|--------------------|----------|
| Gender                           | Male                 | 2.65 | 0.50               | 245      |
|                                  | Female               | 2.69 | 0.55               | 513      |
| Years as teacher                 | Higher               | 2.73 | 0.55               | 381      |
|                                  | Lower                | 2.59 | 0.51               | 222      |
| Highest degree                   | BA                   | 2.71 | 0.58               | 129      |
|                                  | MA                   | 2.66 | 0.53               | 537      |
|                                  | Specialist           | 2.71 | 0.51               | 73       |
|                                  | Doctorate            | 2.6  | 0.53               | 17       |
| Coaching experience              | Yes                  | 2.64 | 0.48               | 422      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.71 | 0.58               | 341      |
| Localism                         | Higher               | 2.73 | 0.55               | 298      |
|                                  | Lower                | 2.64 | 0.52               | 452      |
| Cosmopolitanism                  | Higher               | 2.67 | 0.55               | 356      |
|                                  | Lower                | 2.68 | 0.53               | 390      |
| Administrative licensure         | Yes                  | 2.68 | 0.49               | 378      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.68 | 0.58               | 383      |
| Rural                            | Yes                  | 2.69 | 0.52               | 228      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.67 | 0.55               | 525      |
| Urban                            | Yes                  | 2.66 | 0.57               | 211      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.68 | 0.53               | 542      |
| School enrollment                | Higher               | 2.67 | 0.56               | 365      |
|                                  | Lower                | 2.67 | 0.52               | 404      |
| School level                     | Preschool-Elementary | 2.71 | 0.52               | 251      |
|                                  | Middle               | 2.63 | 0.56               | 216      |
|                                  | Secondary-Adult      | 2.69 | 0.52               | 253      |
| Free and reduced-price lunch     | Higher               | 2.66 | 0.57               | 285      |
|                                  | Lower                | 2.66 | 0.52               | 279      |
| Laissez-faire principal          | Yes                  | 2.64 | 0.49               | 119      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.66 | 0.55               | 576      |
| Autocratic principal             | Yes                  | 2.71 | 0.50               | 158      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.64 | 0.55               | 537      |
| Democratic principal             | Yes                  | 2.66 | 0.57               | 168      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.66 | 0.53               | 527      |
| Encouragement from administrator | Yes                  | 2.68 | 0.51               | 287      |
|                                  | No                   | 2.67 | 0.56               | 482      |

variance was explained by three variables, years as a teacher, localist values, and perception of the importance of encouragement from school leaders (see Table 4). Teachers who had more experience, those whose values were more strongly localist, and those who perceived the encouragement of school leaders as important were more likely than other teachers to give high salience ratings to the disincentives associated with the principalship.

**Table 3. Regression results with incentive scale as the dependent variable**

| Variable                                  | Zero-order correlations | Unstandardized regression coefficient | Standard error | Standardized regression coefficient | Variance inflation factor |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Gender                                    | .06                     | .054                                  | .068           | .039                                | 1.44                      |
| Years as teacher                          | -.03                    | -.009                                 | .003           | -.118**                             | 1.14                      |
| Highest degree                            | .13                     | .068                                  | .05            | .063                                | 1.28                      |
| Coaching experience                       | .047                    | -.022                                 | .063           | -.017                               | 1.43                      |
| Localism                                  | -.07                    | .004                                  | .043           | .004                                | 1.15                      |
| Cosmopolitanism                           | .32                     | .333                                  | .052           | .286****                            | 1.21                      |
| Administrative licensure                  | .15                     | .125                                  | .062           | .098*                               | 1.42                      |
| Rural                                     | -.03                    | -.065                                 | .067           | -.047                               | 1.40                      |
| Urban                                     | .06                     | -.097                                 | .083           | -.069                               | 2.08                      |
| School enrollment                         | .02                     | -.000                                 | .000           | -.014                               | 1.56                      |
| School level                              | .05                     | .063                                  | .038           | .091                                | 1.91                      |
| Percentage free and reduced-price lunch   | .06                     | .293                                  | .158           | .108                                | 2.06                      |
| Laissez-faire principal                   | -.04                    | -.006                                 | .082           | -.003                               | 1.18                      |
| Autocratic principal                      | -.06                    | -.117                                 | .07            | -.075                               | 1.22                      |
| Democratic principal                      | .05                     | -.042                                 | .067           | -.029                               | 1.23                      |
| Encouragement from current administrators | .44                     | .257                                  | .029           | .386****                            | 1.11                      |

Note.  $n = 597$ . Adjusted  $r^2 = .276$ .

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p \leq .0001$ .

#### VARIABLES INFLUENCING THE TRADE-OFFS

In order to develop a more detailed understanding of the way teachers view the trade-off between the incentives and disincentives associated with the principalship, we calculated a “trade-off” score for each teacher, simply by subtracting the disincentive score from the incentive score. A positive result indicated that a teacher saw incentives as more salient than disincentives, and a negative result indicated the opposite. We then categorized teachers with positive scores into one group ( $n = 225$ ), which we called the “worth it” group, and those with negative scores ( $n = 497$ ), which we called the “not worth it” group, into another. We excluded the 13 respondents for whom incentives and disincentives were of equal weight. Descriptive statistics (with chi-square comparisons for frequency data and one-way analysis of variance for comparisons of means) illustrated the differences between the two

**Table 4. Regression results with disincentive scale as the dependent variable**

| Variable                                  | Zero-order correlations | Unstandardized regression coefficient | Standard error | Standardized regression coefficient | Variance inflation factor |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Gender                                    | -.07                    | -.055                                 | .068           | -.047                               | 1.45                      |
| Years as teacher                          | .110                    | .009                                  | .003           | .141**                              | 1.14                      |
| Highest degree                            | -.014                   | -.034                                 | .048           | -.038                               | 1.44                      |
| Coaching experience                       | -.06                    | -.048                                 | .063           | -.044                               | 1.27                      |
| Localism                                  | .132                    | .111                                  | .041           | .136**                              | 1.13                      |
| Cosmopolitanism                           | .014                    | .017                                  | .051           | .017                                | 1.19                      |
| Administrative licensure                  | -.035                   | -.089                                 | .062           | -.082                               | 1.41                      |
| Rural                                     | -.016                   | -.061                                 | .067           | -.051                               | 1.39                      |
| Urban                                     | -.016                   | -.037                                 | .082           | -.031                               | 2.06                      |
| School enrollment                         | .037                    | .000                                  | .000           | .006                                | 1.56                      |
| School level                              | .012                    | .044                                  | .028           | .076                                | 1.91                      |
| Percentage free and reduced-price lunch   | -.00                    | .086                                  | .156           | .038                                | 2.06                      |
| Laissez-faire principal                   | -.00                    | .074                                  | .081           | .047                                | 1.18                      |
| Autocratic principal                      | .07                     | .117                                  | .07            | .089                                | 1.21                      |
| Democratic principal                      | .02                     | .058                                  | .067           | .046                                | 1.23                      |
| Encouragement from current administrators | .154                    | .095                                  | .028           | .171***                             | 1.13                      |

Note.  $n = 580$ . Adjusted  $r^2 = .043$ .

\*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

groups on a variety of personal and professional indicators. Comparisons of frequency data are provided in Table 5, and comparisons of means are provided in Table 6.

These analyses showed that certain characteristics and experiences differentiated between teachers for whom incentives outweighed disincentives (i.e., the “worth it” group) and those for whom disincentives outweighed incentives (i.e., the “not worth it” group). Significant results suggested the following generalizations: (a) proportionately more males were in the “worth it” group, (b) proportionately more people holding administrative licensure were in the “worth it” group, and (c) proportionately more people who had been encouraged by a practicing administrator to consider a principalship position were in the “worth it” group. No differences among groups were found on the basis of age, marital status, highest degree level obtained, teaching experience, coaching experience, locale, school size, or grade level of teaching assignment.

**Table 5. Cross-tabulations for “worth it” and “not worth it” groups**

| Variable                            | Frequencies  | Chi-square | Significance |
|-------------------------------------|--|------------|--------------|
| Gender                              | Worth it = 40.1% male<br>Not worth it = 28.8% male                 | 8.84       | .003         |
| Administrative licensure            | Worth it = 58.4% held license<br>Not worth it = 45.7% held license | 9.73       | .002         |
| Asked to consider being a principal | Worth it = 65.5% yes<br>Not worth it = 51.9% yes                   | 10.94      | .001         |
| Coached athletic team               | Worth it = 49.5% yes<br>Not worth it = 43.6% yes                   | 2.16       | .142         |
| Rural                               | Worth it = 30.4% rural<br>Not worth it = 30.8% rural               | .01        | .919         |
| Married                             | Worth it = 76.8% married<br>Not worth it = 79.3% married           | .582       | .445         |

*Note.*  $n = 225$  in “worth it” group,  $n = 497$  in “not worth it” group.

SUBSET ANALYSIS: THOSE WHO HAVE APPLIED FOR PRINCIPAL POSITIONS

Among those of our respondents holding administrative licensure, 276 (i.e., 63.7% of that sample) reported having applied at some time or other for a principal’s position. Of this group of former applicants, 81 (29.5%) had been hired for at least one administrative position but had subsequently left, and 32 (11.6%) did not provide information about the outcome of their application. The 163 remaining teachers—those who had applied but had not been hired—represent a group of individuals who possess the requisite credential but have nevertheless been overlooked for principalships.

**Table 6. Mean comparisons for “worth it” and “not worth it” groups**

| Variable                  | Means and standard deviations  | F     | Significance |
|---------------------------|--|-------|--------------|
| Age                       | Worth it ( $M = 43.36, SD = 10.06$ )<br>Not worth it ( $M = 43.98, SD = 8.89$ )  | 0.665 | .415         |
| Years as teacher          | Worth it ( $M = 16.58, SD = 9.09$ )<br>Not worth it ( $M = 17.96, SD = 8.61$ )   | 3.735 | .054         |
| Years in current position | Worth it ( $M = 9.69, SD = 8.28$ )<br>Not worth it ( $M = 10.64, SD = 7.87$ )    | 2.056 | .152         |
| Highest degree            | Worth it ( $M = 2.03, SD = .593$ )<br>Not worth it ( $M = 1.95, SD = .604$ )     | 2.742 | .098         |
| Grade level               | Worth it ( $M = 3.02, SD = .907$ )<br>Not worth it ( $M = 2.92, SD = .967$ )     | 1.576 | .210         |
| School enrollment         | Worth it ( $M = 679.8, SD = 449.2$ )<br>Not worth it ( $M = 705.1, SD = 489.5$ ) | 0.424 | .515         |

*Note.*  $n = 225$  in “worth it” group,  $n = 497$  in “not worth it” group.

**Table 7. Comparisons between “overlooked” applicants and other teachers**

| Variable                  | Comparison  | Statistic       | Significance      |
|---------------------------|---|-----------------|-------------------|
| Gender                    | Overlooked = 58.8% female<br>Not overlooked = 70.8% female  | $\Pi^2 = 8.843$ | .003              |
| Age                       | Overlooked ( $M = 46.12$ , $SD = 8.17$ )<br>Not overlooked ( $M = 43.57$ ,<br>$SD = 9.57$ )         | $t = -3.44$     | .001 <sup>a</sup> |
| Years as teacher          | Overlooked ( $M = 20.46$ , $SD = 8.02$ )<br>Not overlooked ( $M = 17.26$ ,<br>$SD = 8.88$ )         | $t = -4.44$     | .000 <sup>a</sup> |
| Years in current position | Overlooked ( $M = 11.73$ , $SD = 8.0$ )<br>Not overlooked ( $M = 10.03$ ,<br>$SD = 8.05$ )          | $t = -2.35$     | .019              |
| Highest degree            | Overlooked ( $M = 2.23$ , $SD = .513$ )<br>Not overlooked ( $M = 1.92$ , $SD = .592$ )              | $t = -6.04$     | .000              |
| Grade level               | Overlooked ( $M = 3.05$ , $SD = .817$ )<br>Not overlooked ( $M = 2.9$ , $SD = .969$ )               | $t = -2.02$     | .045 <sup>a</sup> |
| School enrollment         | Overlooked ( $M = 722.28$ ,<br>$SD = 480.05$ )<br>Not overlooked ( $M = 686.03$ ,<br>$SD = 461.5$ ) | $t = -0.89$     | .374              |

Note.  $n = 163$  in the overlooked group,  $n = 717$  in the other teacher group.

<sup>a</sup>Tests with unequal variance assumed (Levene’s test showed unequal variances).

Because only a small proportion of these individuals (36.4%) is still interested in applying to fill school administration vacancies, this group cannot be said at the present to constitute a potential applicant pool. At one time, though, every person in this group did consider him- or herself to be a viable candidate for a principal’s position. In a theoretical sense, then, these teachers might be said to characterize an untapped resource, because in the past, when they were interested in principalship roles, districts failed to employ them. Examining their characteristics provides insight into the sorts of people whom districts are failing to employ as principals.

Descriptive data reveal that 57.4% of these teachers are women and that 80.9% hold the master’s as their highest degree. In general, moreover, these teachers are highly experienced (mean years as teacher = 20.43,  $SD = 8.03$ ) and have spent a little more than half of their careers in their current jobs (mean years in current position = 11.75,  $SD = 8.02$ ). In comparison to the rest of the sample, this group tends to be older, more experienced (both as a teacher and in their current position), and more highly educated. In addition, this group has more males than would be expected on the basis of chance alone (see Table 7).

This latter finding, however, needs to be interpreted cautiously, considering that (a) overall almost 70% of the respondents to our survey were

female and (b) men are still disproportionately represented in the principalship. We saw more practical relevance, therefore, in the finding that 57% of those overlooked were female than in the fact that a significant difference existed between the percentage of males in the overlooked group and the percentage in the rest of the sample. Moreover, among those in our sample who had been hired as principals (but had subsequently left the position), 61.3% were male. Taken together, these findings seem to suggest that, with regard to the theoretical applicant pool represented by the subset (i.e., those who had applied for principalships), gender bias (against females) is likely to have exerted its typical chilling effect.

### CONCLUSIONS

As well as confirming generalizations from previous studies concerning teachers' views of the principalship, findings from this study also suggest that some groups of teachers see the principalship as having incentives sufficiently potent to make the job seem worthwhile. For those seeking to maintain the vitality of school administration, these findings represent good news. In particular, teachers who have fewer years of experience, value career advancement, and have taken the initiative to pursue administrative licensure seem to be the most likely pool of potential applicants. Moreover, teachers who believe that encouragement from current school leaders is important to their decision about pursuing a position as principal seem to be more highly attuned to both the incentives and disincentives associated with the job.

This finding is particularly interesting because it suggests a useful leverage point. If a district wishes to cultivate a pool of potential new leaders, it might be well served by having its current leaders identify and then groom a cadre of new leaders. Using coaches and mentors to assist aspiring administrators is not a new idea, of course. It has been reported as a promising practice in the professional literature (e.g., Crow & Matthews, 1998) and used to good advantage in some districts (e.g., Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003). Furthermore, some writers see this approach as particularly valuable for female educators who aspire to become school administrators (e.g., Scanlon, 1997).

Even though some mentoring programs address the needs of females, the approach still harbors the danger of creating an "old-boy network." Districts will need explicitly to guard against this tendency by assuring that the group of teachers singled out as having leadership potential represents the diversity within the district. In fact, a district may want to take steps to demonstrate a commitment to social justice by nurturing a group of potential principals whose characteristics are even more diverse than those of

its teaching staff. And given what our data suggest about gender bias, districts need to make special efforts to ensure that qualified females receive fair consideration for positions as school leaders.

In addition to these encouraging findings, however, the study also revealed dynamics that might suggest cause for concern. The finding that teachers generally view the disincentives associated with the principalship as more salient than the incentives is particularly troubling, implying that, for large numbers of teachers, the principalship appears not to represent a professional aspiration. This circumstance makes it unlikely that school hierarchies actually will work in the manner posited by bureaucratic theory, namely, to link increasing expertise with increasing responsibility and span of control. Moreover, if teachers do not see administration as the valued culmination of a career in education, but instead as an unpleasant task undertaken by individuals substantially different from themselves, they will tend, in the main, to discredit what school leaders contribute. It is not too far-fetched, then, to imagine as typical a situation in which relatively inexperienced educators responding to incentives that other educators disavow assume administration positions in which they are supposed to provide guidance to more experienced, but also more skeptical and self-interested, colleagues.

Perhaps the most curious finding from this study was that teachers' perspectives on the principalship did not seem to be influenced to any meaningful degree by the conditions in the districts where they worked. Demographics that typically play an important role in shaping school outcomes (e.g., socioeconomic status, school size) appear to have little effect on teachers' views about the incentives and disincentives associated with school administration. Does this finding suggest that conditions of the principalship do not vary appreciably in response to local circumstances? Or does it tell more about how teachers are socialized to the profession? Answers to questions such as these may suggest additional points of leverage for educators and policymakers who are seeking to improve the incentive structure that supports school administration. Studies that promote more nuanced understandings of such dynamics are needed in order to elaborate the general trends made evident in the survey research (including this study) that has been conducted to date.

## APPENDIX

## TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

*Part I: Views About the Principalship*

To what extent do the following conditions affect *your* decision to seek or not seek a position as a school *principal*?

|   | Very low<br>extent | Low<br>extent | High<br>extent | Very high<br>extent |
|---|--------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Improved annual salary as a principal   | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| Lower per diem salary as a principal  | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| Greater control over one's work schedule as a principal                               | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| Expectation for the principal to spend more time in the building                      | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| The principalship involves excessive pressure to perform                              | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| Higher status as a school <i>leader</i>   | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| Improved benefit package for principals   | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| The principalship is overly dominated by males  | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| High levels of administrative support   | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| Increased opportunities for professional growth as a principal                        | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| Need for greater amounts of technical knowledge required in the principalship         | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| Anticipated satisfaction associated with "making a difference" as a principal         | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| Lack of clarity about job expectations of principals                                  | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |
| Principals' increased burden of responsibility for local, state, and federal mandates | 1                  | 2             | 3              | 4                   |

|  |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| Low levels of administrative support   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Encouragement to become a principal offered by practicing administrators                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Opportunity as a principal to implement creative personal ideas  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Accountability for societal conditions beyond an educator's control  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Chance to have a greater impact as a principal   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Less job security as a principal   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Stress associated with anticipated conflict with teachers' unions  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Anticipated satisfaction of providing support to staff   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Anticipated stress associated with supervising staff   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Anticipated stress associated with leaving a peer group of teachers  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Expectation for the principal to attend extracurricular activities   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Anticipated stress associated with the change in focus from dealing with children to dealing with adults       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Opportunity as a principal to act autonomously   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Anticipated respect for a principal's authority  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Anticipated satisfaction associated with the change in focus from dealing with children to dealing with adults | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Decreased opportunity to work with children directly   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Anticipated stress associated with lack of respect for school principals                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Anticipated stress associated with having to "play politics"   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Anticipated stress about having less time at home with family members  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Ability to affect the lives of a greater number of children  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

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*Part II: Value Positions*


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| How important are the following values to you personally?         | Not<br>important<br>at all | Not<br>important | Important | Very<br>important |
|---|----------------------------|------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Remaining in the school district in which I am currently employed | 1                          | 2                | 3         | 4                 |
| Living close to where I was born and/or raised                    | 1                          | 2                | 3         | 4                 |
| Having the opportunity to apply for jobs anywhere in the country  | 1                          | 2                | 3         | 4                 |
| Making a name for myself in the field of education                | 1                          | 2                | 3         | 4                 |
| Staying in the same community for most of my life                 | 1                          | 2                | 3         | 4                 |
| Traveling to broaden my horizons                                  | 1                          | 2                | 3         | 4                 |
| Setting down roots  | 1                          | 2                | 3         | 4                 |
| Leaving home to seek career opportunities                         | 1                          | 2                | 3         | 4                 |
| Living in a larger community than the one in which I was raised   | 1                          | 2                | 3         | 4                 |

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*Part III: Perceptions About Your Work*

List the three most important reasons you would decide to take an administrative position.

List the three things that would be most difficult about leaving teaching that would not be available to you as an administrator.

List the three most important reasons you are not currently holding an administrative position.

What leadership experiences have you had in your role as a teacher?

How would you best describe the leadership style of your current principal? Circle the best choice

autocratic    consultative    democratic    laissez-faire (hands-off)

Has an administrator in your school or district ever suggested that you should pursue a position as a school administrator?    yes    no

*Part IV: Information About You*

1. Gender    Male    Female ≡
2. Age \_\_\_\_\_
3. Years as a teacher \_\_\_\_\_ ≡
4. Years in current position \_\_\_\_\_
5. Highest degree obtained (circle the best answer) bachelor's    master's    specialist    doctorate
6. Have you ever coached an athletic team? Yes    No
7. What is the grade level at which most of your teaching takes place? (circle the best answer)  
pre-K-K    1-4    5-8    9-12    adult
8. Marital status (circle the answer that best reflects your status)  
single    married    divorced    widowed

9. Are you responsible for the care of pre-college-aged children? yes no

10. If so, how many pre-college-aged children are in your household?——

11. Are you responsible for the care of elderly relatives? yes no

12. If so, how many elderly relatives are in your household?——

13. Have you ever held a certificate/license that entitles you to be employed as a school administrator? yes no

*If you answered yes to question 13, please answer the following questions:*

13a. What was the original issue date (approximate) of your first administrative certificate/license?——

13b. Is your administrative certificate/license up to date? yes no

13c. Rank from 1 (most important) to 6 (least important) the following of your reasons for pursuing a degree in school administration.

—— The program prepared you for an administrative position that you wanted to pursue.

—— The program was easier than other available degree programs.

—— The program was delivered in a more convenient location than other available degree programs.

—— The program was delivered at more convenient times than other available degree programs.

—— The program provided career options that you might make use of in the future.

—— The program had a reputation for providing high quality preparation.

13d. Have you ever applied for a position as a school administrator? yes no

13e. How many times have you applied for a position as a school administrator? ——

13f. What was the outcome of your application? (Circle the best answer.)

- a. I was hired for one such position, but subsequently returned to classroom teaching.
- b. I was hired for more than one such position, but subsequently returned to the classroom.
- c. I was not hired for an administrative position.

13g. Why did you leave your position as a school administrator?————

13h. Are you currently seeking a position as a school administrator?   yes   no

*Part V: Information About Your District*

1. How would you characterize your district?

mostly rural   mostly suburban   mostly urban

2. What is the student enrollment in your building?————

*Part VI: School Identification Number*

IRN ———

We are including this number so we can look up information about your school and district (e.g., socioeconomic characteristics, number of teachers in the Ohio Department of Education database and the database maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics). We will not use this information to pinpoint your school in any publicly accessible document.

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## Notes

1 Reliabilities for the incentive scale were .78 and .74 for the principal and superintendent samples, respectively. Reliabilities for the disincentive scale were .81 and .84 for the principal and superintendent samples, respectively.

2 Directory information for all teachers in Ohio was provided by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). The ODE also sorted the teachers into two categories, those holding administrative certificates or licenses and those not holding administrative certificates or licenses.

3 We also omitted four independent variables with large numbers of missing values. None of these variables had come close to reaching significance in the original analyses. Although patterns of influence were similar, two marginally significant influences in the original analyses ceased to reach significance in the analyses using series mean substitution. Output from these analyses is available from the first author.

4 Our localism scale measured the extent to which teachers valued place.

5 Our cosmopolitanism scale measured the extent to which teachers valued career advancement. Our constructs for localism and cosmopolitanism were similar to the constructs “place-based” and “career-based” that Carlson (1972) used to distinguish between types of superintendents.

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