Motivation for Pursuing a Degree in Education Administration

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This empirical paper presents findings from a mixed method study that sought to identify the factors that motivate graduate students to pursue a degree in the field of educational administration. One hundred sixty-one graduate students from three universities located in Mississippi participated in the study. Participants completed a 10-item survey using a four-point Likert rating scale and responded to an open-ended question to provide both quantitative and qualitative data for the study. Data were analyzed and compared by age, gender, and race. Analysis of the quantitative data showed the top five reasons for entering the field of educational administration were a) students, b) teachers, c) career advancements, d) challenging and rewarding job, and e) pay. Results clearly showed the prospect of a pay raise was a motivating factor, but not as important as intrinsic factors such as caring for students and the desire to make a difference. Statistically significant differences were found between Black and White groups for three of the ten identified motivating factors.

Review of the Literature

The Principal Shortage

There is little debate that a critical shortage of principals exists in the United States. During the last decade principals have been leaving the field of education in large numbers, while the pool of highly qualified applicants to replace those that have left has dwindled (Guterman, 2007). Understanding why some educators continue to pursue the field of educational administration can be important to the recruitment and retention of future school leaders and has implications for both K-12 schools and higher education programs.
A national study conducted in 2003 revealed as many as 42% of elementary school administrators and 50% of secondary school administrators had left the field during the 10-year period of the study (Norton, 2003). More than one-half of the 403 school districts surveyed in this nationwide study also reported having trouble filling their administrative vacancies. This, coupled with the fact that 40% of principals in the United States will be nearing retirement by 2009 (Rodriguez, 1999), indicates that the availability of school administrators is in a state of crisis and the trend is expected to continue (Caldwell, 2000; Fullan, 2005; Guterman, 2007; Olsen, Maple & Stage, 1995; Pyke, 2002; Rodriguez, 1999; & Wallace, 2003).

Although the problem is pervasive throughout the nation, principal shortages vary by region, state, and district. For instance, New York City Schools lost half their principals between 2002 and 2006 (New York Times, 2006). It was predicted that student enrollment would increase in Minnesota creating more teachers positions, while at the same time 75% of individuals in principal positions would be lost through retirement or attrition by the end of the decade. (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000).

In California up to 90% of public school districts reported a serious shortage of candidates for secondary principal vacancies, and 73% reported limited candidate pools for elementary principal positions (Recruitment and Retention…., 2006). With the exception of affluent districts, the number of applicants for principal positions declined in the state of Michigan by 50-67% (Cusick, 2003).

These figures are staggering especially considering the fact that the pool of applicants has dwindled as fewer teachers are choosing to enter the field of educational administration (Rayfield & Diamantes, 2004 a). As predicted by many researchers
earlier in this decade, a study jointly commissioned by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Guterman, 2007), revealed 50% of participating school districts had difficulties filling vacant principal positions due to a limited pool of candidates.

While some individuals make the decision not to pursue eligibility requirements to become principals, such as administrative degrees and certification, there are literally thousands of teachers who hold administrative licenses but choose not to pursue careers as principals (Recruitment and Retention, 2007). Traditionally, assistant principals have been considered a good source from which to identify potential principal candidates. However, not all assistant principals aspire to move into the principalship. One study found 70% of secondary assistant principals indicated they would not pursue opportunities to become principals (Pounder and Merrill, 2001).

In 2001, Pounder and Merrill asserted there were enough certified individuals in educational administration to fill all principal positions in the United States. Having enough was not the problem; rather, they determined the real issue was finding enough individuals who were highly qualified and willing to serve. Later, Fullan (2006) concurred that the distribution of highly qualified principals across the nation remained a challenge as the weaker principals usually work at the most challenging schools. School districts with the fewest applicants are typically those with the most challenging working conditions, higher concentrations of poor and minority students, and lower salaries for principals (Fullan, 2005).
Theoretical Framework

Motivated employees that are satisfied with their job roles are desired by employers, as they tend to be more productive, happier, and fulfilled (Fullan, 2005). The realm of educational administration is no exception. The shortage of principals in school settings across the United States during the last decade has reached a critical stage as the applicant pool to fill principal vacancies has dwindled (Caldwell, 2000; Fullan, 2005; Guterman, 2007; Olsen, Maple & Stage, 1995; Pyke, 2002; Rodriguez, 1999; & Wallace, 2003).

Understanding what motivates individuals to actively pursue a career in educational administration could provide insight that will assist in the recruitment, training, and retention of highly qualified principal candidates to address the vacancies that are plaguing American schools.

Job Satisfaction

“Job satisfaction refers to the individual’s emotional reactions to a particular job” (Gruneberg, 1979, p. 3). Theorists and practitioners seem to accept the assumption that almost everyone seeks satisfaction in his or her work (Jepsen & Sheu, 2003). However, Americans are growing increasingly unhappy with their jobs. The decline in job satisfaction is widespread among workers of all ages and all income brackets. The study revealed that over the past decade job satisfaction has declined by 10 percent, and “approximately one-quarter of the American workforce is simply showing up to collect a paycheck” (Gruneberg, 1979, p. 1). The largest decline took place in the 35-44 year-old age group followed by those, the 45-54 year-old age group. The smallest decline was seen in workers over age 65.
“General job satisfaction, the overall attitude of liking or disliking a job, is a universal and essential aspect of adult career development” (Jepsen & Sheu, 2003, p. 162). Abraham Maslow’s (1954) theory on motivation and human behavior was based on his belief that human behavior is motivated by the desire of each individual to reach the highest level of his or her capability. Maslow (1954) and thousands of other researchers have validated that workers seek satisfaction in their work (Jepsen & Sheu, 2003).

Job satisfaction is of high importance in the workplace and can be a determining factor that causes one to apply for another job, stay in a job, or even leave a job for another one (MeMato & Curcio, 2004). According to MeMato and Curcio (2004) job satisfaction contributes to job performance, influences emotional and physical well-being and is necessary to ensure high quality performance. While job dissatisfaction is associated with stress and burnout, it can also be associated with a number of potentially damaging personal and professional symptoms.

There is a definite link between job satisfaction and the propensity to leave a job (Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Fullan, 2005). Stress and job dissatisfaction are factors that cause individuals to abandon their jobs and careers. Lack of job satisfaction may lead to burnout and cause workers to (a) leave a profession prior to retirement, (b) change jobs, or (c) enter a completely new career path. It has been suggested that one of the best ways to strengthen the educational leadership profession would be to make it a more satisfying career (Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Latham 1998 & Fullan, 2005).

Sutter (1996) stated, “If factors that may predict assistant principals’ levels of job and career satisfaction could be determined, perhaps steps could be taken to improve their
job and career satisfaction” (p. 109). The same should hold true for the position of principal. Further studies could result in improvements in principal recruitment and retention and alleviate principal shortage.

In a study completed by Pearson (1998), “Job satisfaction and leisure satisfaction were found to be significant positive predictors of psychological health” (p. 416). Pearson went on to say that, this becomes a serious implication for school leaders. If they do not have enough time, or take enough time to involve themselves in satisfying leisure activities to even out the stress they get from work, burnout may occur or psychological health issues arise that may affect job satisfaction and performance. Fullan (2005) suggested that leaders should balance highly engaged periods of problem-solving and energized activities with periods or positive rituals or routines and time for energy recovery if they want to stay motivated and leave lasting legacies. Failure to do so can lead to burnout and poor physical and mental health. “Individual sustainability concerns the ability of the person to keep on going without burning out” (Fullan, 2005, p. 35).

Motivation Theory

Some educators and psychologists believe that the source of motivation may be an inner drive, desire, or energy focused on achievement and getting ahead in a social structure (McKee & Phillips, 2001). Employers look at what can be motivating for a potential employee to keep them employed with the organization and to motivate them to excel (Fullan, 2005). Psychologists (McKee & Phillips, 2001) have identified two types of motivations in human behavior: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations are things that we do with no visible goal or particular reward in mind, instead we are motivated from within based on what is pleasurable to us. Mortimer (1979) further
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explained intrinsic aspects of work create job satisfaction. However, the presence of extrinsic rewards rarely lead to satisfaction, but their absence can lead to job dissatisfaction. Extrinsic motivations focus on a tangible, external reward, such as food or money.

According to this theory, “behavior is increased or decreased by its consequences—that is, by what immediately follows the behavior after it occurs” (McKee & Phillips, 2001, p.4). If the consequence is positive, the behavior is reinforced and tends to increase in frequency; however, if the consequence is negative, the behavior is suppressed or extinguished. Additionally, if a behavior is not rewarded or punished, it will, in time, no longer be emitted. For instance, discovering that we can do one thing well encourages us to try other things. Consequently, we gain self-confidence and self-esteem. Each success experience builds momentum for continued success; thusly, such positive reinforcing events create what we call motivation.

Abraham Maslow (1956) contended people are not merely controlled or motivated by mechanical forces and life should not be controlled by stimuli or reinforcement. Maslow believed that human motivation is based on an individual’s desire to reach the highest levels of his or her capabilities. To explain his theory, Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs that consisted of several different motivational needs. The model developed could be represented by a pyramid with the most basic needs at the bottom and the higher-level needs at the top of the pyramid. Beginning at the bottom of the pyramid, the most basic and most powerful needs were *biological*, such as the needs for oxygen, food, water, warmth, and shelter. Before one could move up the hierarchy of motivational needs, the *biological* needs would have to be met first. This pattern would
continue as the bottom rungs of the pyramid of motivation needs would have to be met at any level before one could move to the next higher level. The second motivation was the need for safety and freedom from fear, followed by belongingness and love or the need to obtain and give affection and to be a contributing member of society. The fourth level was then the need for esteem or self-worth characterized by a high level of self-respect and respect from others resulting in feeling valuable and self-confident. The fifth level as the top rung was the need for self-actualization or a state of self-fulfillment where one reaches his or her highest potential. Maslow believed that all humans strive to reach the highest levels of their capability along the pyramid of needs.

Although, Maslow’s theory of motivation represented by the hierarchy of needs has been difficult to measure, it has provided a model for understanding personal growth and emphasized that if humans are struggling with hunger and thirst, they will probably be less concerned about belonging or esteem. This information has implications for understanding the factors that motivate individuals to pursue or to leave a career as a school principal. When principals are stressed, constantly “under fire” from stakeholders, or continuously engaged in high energy activities, they may feel they are functioning at the level of safety or survival rather than self-actualization.

By 1969, it was estimated that over 4000 studies of job satisfaction had been conducted (Gruneberg, 1976). Since that time, a plethora of studies have added to the literature on job satisfaction. Chambers (1999) contended that job satisfaction is considered an important and desirable goal for organizations because satisfied workers perform at higher levels than those who are not satisfied.
In early research on worker motivation, productivity, and satisfaction, five elements are important to the productivity and satisfaction of individual members and the overall effectiveness of the group. According to Zaleznik (1958, p. 35), these elements include:

1. Technical organization of the group;
2. Social structure of the group;
3. Individual task motivation, i.e., the willingness to work hard that each member brings to and maintains toward his job;
4. Rewards he receives from doing his job; and
5. Satisfaction obtained from being an accepted member of the group.

An individual’s ability to obtain job satisfaction is proportional to the degree to which they are able to implement self-concepts that they envision for themselves from that job (Jepsen & Sheu, 2003). If a person becomes engaged in work that matches his or her occupational self-concept, then he or she is likely to experience general job satisfaction. Specifically, the match between expressed occupational choices and the kind of work that a person enters contributes to the person’s general job satisfaction.

Herzberg (1966) identified five factors that stand apart as strong determiners of job satisfaction and achievement. These were “recognition, work itself, responsibility, and advancement – the last three being of greater importance for lasting change of attitudes” (p. 72). Dissatisfiers were described as, “company policy and administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations and working conditions” (p. 74). The job satisfiers represented man’s relationship to what he does. The dissatisfiers, described
man’s relationship to the context or environment in which he does his job. Job dissatisfiers were called “hygiene factors” while the satisfiers were labeled “motivators.”

Herzberg (1966) found that the factors involved in producing job satisfaction were separate and distinct from the factors that led to job dissatisfaction. He concluded that, the opposite of job satisfaction would not be job dissatisfaction, but rather no job satisfaction; similarly, the opposite of job dissatisfaction is no job dissatisfaction. Further, hygiene factors fail to provide for positive job satisfaction because they do not provide for an individual’s sense of growth.

Worker burnout is evidenced by increased levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced work goals, taking less personal responsibility for work outcomes, greater emotional detachment, work alienation and heightened self-interest (Hughes, 2001). Escape from the situation is a resultant outcome with the “thinking of quitting” as one component of the “climax of burnout” (Hughes 2001). “Only by aggressively intervening in the burnout process is it possible to prevent the potential negative impact of burnout on both the teacher and the educational process” (Hughes, 2001, p. 297).

Many of those suffering from burnout may wish to change jobs or leave the profession but for a variety of reasons, (family, personal, waiting for retirement, mobility issues) may not and stay in the job setting suffering further. This only brings more problems for the educational organization as a whole (Hughes, 2001). Others may leave causing more job openings in a profession that is already struggling to fill the positions.

According to Huttunen and Heikkinen (2004), “Often burnout at work originates in the lack of recognition” (p. 164). They went on to note that recognition is a basic human need. Positive recognition in the workplace creates a feeling of solidarity and
increases job satisfaction where the lack thereof can erode the working community and lower job satisfaction.

The stress load of principals often interferes with their personal lives and interests. Because of the dawn-to-dusk hours that principals must spend addressing school-related concerns, they tend to let personal interests take a back seat to school work, when in fact, personal interests can provide opportunities for formal and informal connections to students and faculty members and can help reduce stress (Foster, 2002). A principal may schedule activities into their day that will provide for both business and pleasure, and in the process see their students and teachers in another light. One suggestion would be to lead an aerobics class or run in practice with the track or cross-country team. Any process that reduces stress and at the same time addresses issues at hand may help prevent burnout.

One of the results of burnout is turnover, or leaving a position for one that appears to be better suited to the individual. “The major cause of turnover and job dissatisfaction are dehumanizing elements in the organization’s culture that ignore or contravene the worker’s values and needs” (Peskin, 1973, p. 2) “There is a clear relationship between worker attitudes (particularly job dissatisfaction and low organizational commitment) and employee turnover” (Mortimer, 1979, p. 1). When the stresses and pressures of the job become too great, coupled with the personality of the administrator contributing to the job fit concept, “the discrepancy evolved into administrator stress and burnout and in some instances resulted in the administrator leaving the profession” (Cooley & Shen 2000, p. 445). “A poor fit between a person and the work environment has consistently been associated with lower job satisfaction and higher rates of turnover” (Olsen, Maple, & Stage, 1995, p. 272) “Job satisfaction and organizational commitment are the most immediate determinants of turnover intentions” (Tang, Kim, & Tang, p. 219).

were drawn to the position of high school principal due to a desire to achieve, influence, and improve education. Other influencing factors included the position’s salary and benefits. On the other hand, negative factors included time demands as well as ethical dilemmas, student discipline problems, termination of unfit employees, and union negotiations. Less than one-third of those surveyed saw the principalship as within their career plans.

Pounder and Merrill (2001) summarized that only those who find the position highly desirable are likely to actively pursue attainment of the position. Those candidates who may only marginally be interested in the position may need stronger incentives or encouragement to seek the high school principalship, or, said conversely, may need less potent disincentives to pursue the position.

*Why do individuals choose not to pursue the principalship?*

Principals participating in the 2000 Principal’s Leadership Summit (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000) were asked to identify major reasons individuals were not pursing careers as principals. The top five reasons were: changing demands of the job; compensation; time commitment; lack of community/parent support and negative media attention; and lack of respect.

*Changing Demands of the Job*

The term “principal” is actually the shortened form of the title “principal teacher.” Originally, the principal’s role was more closely aligned to that of a lead teacher but years of added responsibilities shifted that role from principal teacher to principal manager, disciplinarian, supervisor, fund-raiser, problem-solver, public relations director, chaperone for after-school events, parent complaint resolver, and community relations
The modern principal must deal with “school improvement, annual reports, accountability, core curriculum, student safety, gender and equity issues, mission statements, goals and outcomes, staff development, curriculum alignment... accreditation and special education” (Cusick, 2003). Principals are expected to spearhead the efforts of school reform, to raise student test scores and lead schools to success (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2004). Such accountability issues have been identified as the most critical issues facing school leaders (Roberson, Schweinle & Styron, 2003), and, therefore, a major part of the principal’s day. It is not surprising that “large majorities of school leaders feel overworked” (Stricherz, 2001).

It has been well established that good school leadership is important and that the school leader is seen as the key element in establishing a successful school climate (Marzano, 2003; Norton, 2003; Koll, 1996). A recent meta-analysis of research conducted on effective leadership practices (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2005) showed that leadership has a direct impact on student achievement. The findings of the study suggested that schools and teachers can have a tremendous impact on student success. The study also revealed 66 leadership practices that do have a direct impact on student achievement. Identifying and recruiting “motivated” potential leaders and training them to demonstrate these practices should help to fill the many principal vacancies across our nation. The operative word here is “motivated.” We must have motivated potential leaders that are attracted to the principalship.

So what does make a principal’s job attractive to an applicant? Pounder and Merrill (2001) cited individual psychological needs and different schools, districts and/or administrative positions may meet different needs depending on the individual. Most of
the aspects of the job an individual may find satisfying are intrinsic such as seeing students succeed or achieve at a new level. Great effort will be needed to attract, train, and retain individuals to keep pace with the number of principals that will be leaving the position in the next few years due to retirement and other reasons (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Future school leaders must be provided with the tools needed to be able to cope with the demands placed on them by a wide variety of tasks they will be required to fulfill once they enter the role of an educational administrator (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Koll, 1996; Rayfield, 2004). Educational administrator preparation programs must prepare these individuals to not only deal with the managerial issues of the principalship, but also the tools needed to deal with instructional leadership, time management, and community relations.

Education World asked principals to comment on aspects of their job. Gary Cardwell noted, "Being a principal is not one job; it is a hundred jobs wrapped up into one" (Hopkins, 2008, n.p.). Principal Tim Messick explained, "A principal needs to have the power and strength of Superman, the intelligence of Albert Einstein, the popularity of Princess Diana, the political savvy of a presidential candidate, the care and compassion of Mother Teresa" (Hopkins, 2003). Similarly, Cushing (2004) compared the modern principal to a superhero or religious icon able to be in several places at once, multi-tasking and performing miracles along the way.

Fullan (2005) reported that individual sustainability is based on the school leaders’ ability to keep on going without burning out. For school leaders to sustain, “the key is not an all-out marathon, but rather a cyclical energizing” (p. 35). In other words, leaders should “seek situations that push the limits of their energy and engagement,
coupled with rituals or periodic breaks that are energy recovering” (p. 35). However, the present-day school leaders’ roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined (Fullan, 2005). The problem becomes “discontinuity of direction” with high levels of continual engagement and few periods of routines or breaks for recovery leading to leadership turnover. This behavior affects not only the leader, but it negatively impacts those they lead. Leaders inspire or demoralize others first by how effectively they manage their own energy and next by how well they mobilize, focus, invest, and renew the collective energy of those they lead. It is possible to grow at all levels by expending energy beyond our ordinary limits and then taking some time to recover, and consequently minimize burn out.

Compensation

Teacher salaries have increased at higher rates than educational administrators and the salary gap continues to narrow. It is not uncommon for veteran teachers to receive annual pay equal to or close to that of their principals and in some cases, they earn more. "My friends who started teaching in the district at the same time I did are now making about $2,000 more than me and working 20 fewer days than I am working," said Nancy Ondrasik, principal at Jefferson Elementary School, Warren, Pennsylvania (Hopkins, 2003, n.p.). In New Mexico, recent legislative efforts increased teacher salaries, but neglected to make provisions to increase administrative salaries. As a result, an experienced teacher can earn between $45,000 and $50,000. “By comparison, Albuquerque Public Schools has an assistant principal job advertised with the salary of $44,937 to $51,678” (Gran, 2007, n.p.). Similarly, teachers in New York have continued to receive pay raises while principals have not and many assistant principals have opted
to return to the classroom where they can earn more money and have summers off (Herszenhorn, 2007)

Considering that principals work more hours per day and more days per year, principals can earn as little as $1 to $2 more than if they were serving as classroom teachers (Guterman, 2007) or even less. Many believe the pay differential is not enough, especially considering quality of life issues. In an NAESP study, 58% of superintendents indicated teachers were discouraged from becoming principals because “compensation was insufficient for responsibilities” (Guterman, 2007, n. p.)

Time Commitment

Principals seem to be on a call 24 hours a day. They are expected to be present during the school day and attend district-wide meetings, community events, PTA meetings, professional development, and after-school activities. Often they are first to arrive and last to leave. On average, principals work from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.; 54 hours per week; 240 days per year (Hinton & Kastner, 2000). Though this may seem a huge time commitment, some researchers have estimated the average work week to be even longer, as much as 62 hours per week (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Foster, 2002). Such time commitments leave little time for other activities and can prevent principals from finding time to care for their own personal needs (Foster, 2002) which may lead to the level of burnout described in a North Carolina study that found principals in that state left the job after only four years.

At least 25% of superintendents surveyed across the nation indicated that excessive time commitments were a deterrent to teachers wanting to pursue a career as a principal (Guterman, 2007). This was consistent with a study of 400 lead teachers in
Arkansas who listed excessive time commitments as one of the top reasons for not pursuing an administrative position even though they had been identified as having leadership skills (Hewitt & Stambuck, 2008). “It’s a job that is very demanding on time, time away from family, and we’re finding across this country that more and more people are really not interested in going into the principalship,” Gerald Tirozzi, Director National Association of Secondary School Principals (Bowser, 2001).

**Lack of Community/Parent Support and Negative Media Attention**

Public opinion of public education in the U.S. has been low in recent years and the 2007 *Pi Delta Kappan* Gallup poll indicated that only 16% of adults rated the nation’s schools an “A” or “B” to describe their effectiveness (Center for Public Education, 2007). More recently results from the 2008 *Education Next* –PEPG (Program on Education Policy and Governance) Survey of Public Opinion found, “a public that takes an increasingly critical view both of public schools as they exist today and, perhaps ironically, of many prominent reforms designed to improve them” (Howell, West, & Peterson, 2008).

These results are not surprising considering negative media attention afforded to public education. With headlines like “Do Away With Public Schools” appearing in major US newspapers (Goldberg, 2007) and an education series in the Post that berated school leaders in Washington Public Schools because, “Fifty-six cents out of every dollar goes to administrators who, it's no secret, do a miserable job administrating” (n.p.) it is no mystery that fewer individuals are seeking a career in educational administration. Not only does a lack of support deter potential candidates from seeking principal positions,
but lack of parent support was cited as a contributing factor in why principals leave their jobs (Pounder & Merrill, 2001).

*Lack of Respect*

As indicated, the role of the principal has shifted, public scrutiny of schools has increased and public support has decreased. This and societal changes and increased disciplinary problems has lead to a decline in prestige and respect for the school’s leadership. As the leader of the school, the principal often takes the brunt of criticisms when things go wrong. Where staff and/or student morale is low, respect for the principal can wane.

When asked what inspires women in the workplace, 94% of women indicated respect was extremely important (Career Women, 2003). Respect is a highly motivating factor in the workplace. A lack of respect for the principal can lead to low job satisfaction and is a deterrent to those who may otherwise consider entering the field of educational administration. As explained by Principal Bill Myers, "Esteem needs are near the top of Maslow's pyramid of human needs. People want to feel valued and confident. People, including principals, want and need respect from others" (Hopkins, 2003).

**The Study**

*Rational for the Study*

*Problem*

Despite high attrition rates, low pay, the demands of the job, pay scales and other deterrents to becoming a school principal, some individuals continue to enter graduate programs in Educational Administration. Understanding what attracted these individuals to the field became the focus of a study undertaken by the authors of this paper.
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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify factors that motivated graduate students to pursue degrees in educational administration when so many veteran school leaders are currently leaving the field (Guterman, 2007).

The principal shortage has been compounded by large numbers of school leaders eligible to leave the field of educational administration in the near future. A national study conducted by Wallace Foundation (2003) revealed 40% of the principals in the United States would be eligible to retire by 2009. During the last decade there has been a 42% turnover in elementary school administration and a 50% turnover at the secondary level in the United States.

Understanding why some educators continue to pursue the field can be important to recruitment and retention of future school leaders and has implications for both K-12 schools and university Educational Administration (EDA) programs in addressing the critical shortage of principals in schools.

Research Questions

1. Why do graduate students pursue degrees in educational administration when so many veteran school leaders are currently leaving the field?

2. Are there differences in the responses of the participants in the study to the reasons for entering educational leadership programs by age, gender or race?

Methods

The researchers developed a questionnaire (Appendix A) that was distributed to graduate students enrolled in educational administration courses at three public universities in the state of Mississippi. Professors on each campus were asked to
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Distribute questionnaires to students at class meetings during the fall semester of 2006. Prepared statements were read to students that included the purpose of the research, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, and that participation was voluntary. Completed questionnaires were collected and returned to the researchers.

Design

The study occurred in Mississippi, the home state of the authors. The sample population included graduate students enrolled in educational administration programs at three state funded universities. At the time of the study there were six degree granting programs in the state and all were invited to participate in this study. Three accepted the offer.

The questionnaire solicited basic demographic information such as gender, age, race, degree program, and current job title. Students were also asked if they intended to pursue a job in administration after completing coursework and if so, at which level (assistant principal, principal, central office, or other/specify). Students who indicated they did not intend on seeking an administrative position were prompted to end the survey. Students who indicated they would seek an administrative position were prompted to complete the second part of the questionnaire. Part two of the questionnaire asked students to rate 10 statements using a 4-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree). The stem for each statement was, “I decided to enter the field of Educational Administration because I…” Statements included reasons such as: pay raise, getting out of the classroom, career advancement, impacting children’s lives, could do a great job, wanted a challenging/rewarding job, shortage of administrators, more qualified than current administrators, and desire to be an instructional supervisor.
Participants were asked to rank their top five reasons by writing them in order 1 to 5. Since this portion was open-ended, some students provided their own reasons and others selected reasons from the 10 statements they had rated in the previous section. The last section of the questionnaire asked participants to write a paragraph explaining “why you are planning on entering the field.”

Questionnaires were returned and data were entered into SPSS. Simple means were calculated for the 10 statements rated using a Likert-type scale. A weighted score was calculated for the ranked items, i.e., items ranked as the number one choice received 5 points, items ranked second received 4 points, items ranked third received 3 points and so on. Statements obtained in the last section were compiled using a qualitative method that sought to identify themes. For example, students emerged as a theme from comments such as: love for children, make a difference in children’s lives, and positive difference with students. Another theme was teachers which came from statements like: cultivate a caring faculty, lead teachers to be more effective in the classroom, and lead teachers to become better teachers. Some statements were appropriate for more than one theme. For example the statement, assist teachers in developing our children, was included in both the theme of students and teachers. In these instances, both themes were recorded.

Participants

One hundred sixty-one (161) participants completed questionnaires. Of these 51 (32%) were male and 108 (67%) female, 2 (1%) of the participants did not respond to this question. Responses to the race category indicated 34 (21%) Black Non-Hispanic, 1 (.6%) Black Hispanic, 20 (75%) White Non-Hispanic, 5 (3%) White Hispanic and 1
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(.6%) individual did not answer. For analysis purposes, Blacks and Black Hispanics were considered Black, and Whites and White Hispanic were considered White.

Participants reported age. These ages were recorded by age ranges reported in five-year increments between 25 and 60. The mean age range for the sample was 35.9 with a standard deviation of 7.75. One respondent did not report age. Table 1 reports the frequency and percent of participants per age range category.

**TABLE 1**

*Frequency and Percent of Participants Per Age Range Category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range Per Category</th>
<th>Frequency (N)</th>
<th>Percent (%) Of Participants per Age Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 – 29</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
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<td>30 – 34</td>
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<td>50 – 54</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 – 60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N = 161</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 161 respondents 145 (90%) indicated that they planned to pursue a career in educational administration at some point in the future. Sixteen (10%) indicated they had no plans to enter the field, but were merely getting the advanced degree possibly for a pay raise or for other reasons. Only the 145 respondents who indicated they planned to
pursue a career in educational administration were asked to complete the questionnaire and respond to reasons why they wanted to become an educational administrator.

**Results**

Chi Square tests of association were run to test for an association between age category and each of the 10 statements. No statistical significance was found for either age at the 0.05 level.

A factorial MANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of gender and race on the 10 questions individually. Because the Box’s test was not significant, the Wilks’ Lambda criteria were used. The multivariate test indicated no significant interaction between gender and race, Wilks’ Lambda = F(10, 125) = 1.57, p=.121, nor was there a significant multivariate main effect for gender, F (10, 125 ) = 1.39, p = .192, $\eta^2 = .10$.

However, there was a significant multivariate main effect for race, F(10, 125) = 3.98, p < .001, $\eta^2 = .24$. The means standard errors and confidence intervals for race as a function of the dependent variables are presented in Table 2 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Race (B)lack or (W)hite</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) I have been encouraged by others to do so.</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.075</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>2.815 - 3.335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>3.557</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>3.419 - 3.695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) I wanted a pay raise.</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>2.129 - 2.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>3.200</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>3.017 - 3.383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) I wanted to get out of the classroom.</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2.475</td>
<td>0.198</td>
<td>2.084 - 2.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>2.284</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>2.076 - 2.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) I wanted to advance my career.</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.825</td>
<td>0.334</td>
<td>3.164 - 4.486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>4.006</td>
<td>0.177</td>
<td>3.656 - 4.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) I believe it will allow me to more greatly impact children’s lives</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.675</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>3.386 - 3.964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>3.459</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>3.306 - 3.612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) I felt I would do a better job.</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.800</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>3.600 - 4.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>3.567</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>3.461 - 3.673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) I thought it would be a more challenging and rewarding position.</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.450</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>3.171 - 3.729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>3.179</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>3.030 - 3.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) I thought I could help fill the void since there seems to be a shortage of qualified administrators.</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2.150</td>
<td>0.246</td>
<td>1.663 - 2.637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>2.424</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>2.166 - 2.682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) I believe I can do a better job than contemporary administrators.</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2.500</td>
<td>0.554</td>
<td>1.405 - 3.595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>2.875</td>
<td>0.294</td>
<td>2.293 - 3.456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) I believe teachers need strong instructional supervision, which I will provide.</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.175</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>2.849 - 3.501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>3.146</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>2.973 - 3.319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANOVAs were conducted as follow-up tests on the 10 statements. The *White* group was significantly higher than the *Black* group in both question 1 (p = .001) and 2 (p < .001). By contrast, for statement 6 (p = .04) the *Black* group was significantly higher than the *White* group. There were no significant differences according to age, race, or gender for statements 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Statement 1: have been encouraged by others to do so.
Statement 2: wanted a pay raise.
Statement 6: felt I would do a great job.

Of the 145 participants who indicated they would pursue careers in educational administration, 141 additional comments were submitted. The comments reflected ten general themes or reasons for pursuing an advanced degree in educational administration. The frequency of each theme was determined and reported as a percentage of the total qualitative responses. The survey results showed that the top three reasons for pursuing an advanced degree in educational administration included *helping students to achieve in school* (23.4%) *improving schools* (15.6%), and *making a difference* (15.6%). Table 3 below shows the themes that emerged in the qualitative open-ended question of the study, “Why did you choose to enter into the field of educational administration?” In addition to the themes that emerged, the number that reported each theme as a reason for entering the field of educational administration, and the frequency or percent of the total responses that each theme represented are included in Table 3.
Motivation for pursing a degree in EDA

### TABLE 3
**Reasons for Entering the Field of Educational Administration**
**Number and Percent of Responses per Theme of Qualitative Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme of Responses</th>
<th>Number (N =)</th>
<th>Frequency of Response (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Students</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Improve Schools</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Making a Difference</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Career Advancement</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Intangible Needs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Pay Raise</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Teachers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Challenge</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Can do a better Job</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Recommended by Others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last part of the questionnaire asked participants to write a paragraph explaining “why you are planning on entering the field of educational administration.” Researchers reviewed responses and themes that emerged. Some responses appeared in more than one category and were counted in each. Table 4 shows the major themes that emerged from the qualitative data, the number of responses per theme, and examples of responses per theme.
TABLE 4

Reasons for Entering the Field of Educational Administration
Themes of Qualitative Study Responses, Number of Responses per Theme, and Examples of Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes of Responses</th>
<th>Number of Responses (N)</th>
<th>Examples of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Love for children; want to make an impact on children; positive difference with students; help students achieve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a Difference</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Make a difference, shape the future, facilitate change; impact the next generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Schools</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Improve schools; build better schools; raise standards of education; unify school/home/community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Do a Better Job</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Do better job than principals I have worked with; do for teachers what was not done for me; need strong leadership; I am prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lead teachers to be more effective; help teachers help students; assist teachers; make positive change for teachers; help other teachers improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay Raise</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Money; better salary; improve salary; cannot afford to stay in classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Advancement</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Job security; stepping stone to better job; changed career fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intangible Needs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>It is my calling and my ministry; passion for education; personal satisfaction of obtaining advanced degree; self-improvement; want to be the boss; more active role in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Want the challenge; challenge myself mentally, academically, and spiritually; make me stronger; challenging but rewarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended by Others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Others believe in me; others tell me I am a leader; others tell me I will be a great leader</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

The participants in this study, graduate students enrolled in graduate programs in Educational Administration at 3 public universities in Mississippi, were asked about their reasons for going into the field of administration. The respondents were asked to rate 10 stated reasons, rank their top 5 choices, and write a paragraph about why they were entering the field of educational administration.

The 3 areas that emerged as top reasons participants entered the field of educational administration were related to students, teachers and opportunity for career advancements. Among the 10 reasons rated, these three areas had the highest means and were included more frequently in the rankings of the top five reasons. Students, improving schools, and making a difference emerged as the most frequent themes in the qualitative data. There was also evidence that participants were motivated by intrinsic reasons such as divine calling, job satisfaction, and making a difference. Although pay raise was frequently mentioned as a reason, it had a considerably lower weighted score and was only identified 10 times in the qualitative date. Apparently pay was important but not the primary reason.

Understanding the reasons prospective school administrators enter the field of educational administration can have a positive impact on the recruitment, training, and retention of highly qualified administrators to address the dwindling pool of applicants and the critical shortage of principals across the United States.
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References


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253- 256.


Appendix A

Administrative Rationale Query

Educational leaders are experiencing an increased amount of stress and many school administrators are leaving the field or returning to the classroom. We are interested in knowing the reasons you are pursuing a degree in educational administration and wish to become an administrator. Please answer the following questions openly and honestly. This survey is anonymous and your participation is strictly voluntary.

Demographic Information:

______ Gender: M or F
______ Age
______ Race

USM ELR Program (check one)
______ Master’s
______ Ed Specialist’s
______ Doctorate
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______ Non-Degree

What is your present job? (check one)
______ Teacher
______ Counselor
______ Asst. Principal
______ Principal
______ Other (Please Specify)

After graduation/completion of course work I plan to enter administration.
Yes ____________
No ____________
Undecided ______

If you answered yes to the previous question, complete this sentence:
I would like to enter the field of administration as a/an:
______ Asst. Principal
______ Principal
______ Central Office
______ Other (Please Specify)

I do not plan to become an administrator; I am just pursuing an advanced degree.
______ Yes ________ No

If you answered YES, you have no future plans of entering administration you have completed your part of the survey. Please turn in your questionnaire.

If you answered NO, and you do plan on becoming an administrator please continue on page 2.

Please answer the following questions by circling your response using the scale:
4 strongly agree; 3 agree; 2 disagree or 1 strongly disagree

I decided to enter the field of Education Administration because I:

1. have been encouraged by others to do so. 4 3 2 1
2. wanted a pay raise. 4 3 2 1
3. wanted to get out of the classroom. 4 3 2 1
4. wanted to advance my career. 4 3 2 1
5. believe it will allow me to more greatly impact children’s lives. 4 3 2 1
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6. felt I would do a great job.  
7. thought it would be a more challenging and rewarding position.  
8. thought I could help fill the void since there seems to be a shortage of qualified administrators.  
9. believe I am more qualified than contemporary administrators.  
10. believe teachers need strong instructional supervision, which I will provide.

Please rank your top five reasons for becoming an administrator:

1. ________________________
2. ________________________
3. ________________________
4. ________________________
5. ________________________

Please write a short paragraph on the back explaining why you are planning to enter the field of educational administration. Your comments are important to understanding why you chose this field.

You have completed the questionnaire. Thank you for your help and cooperation.