

Examining the experiences of mentoring to develop current and former Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership skills

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Abstract

The role of an assistant principal is both challenging and multifaceted. The role of an assistant principal who is both Black and female is compounded as this demographic of leaders must navigate both the present demands of the position and racial stressors that often cause low self-confidence and feelings of inadequacy (Robinson, 2014). Cited research indicates that mentoring is effective in developing both leadership capacity and self-confidence or self-efficacy for new school leaders (Allen et al., 1995; Barnett et al., 2017; Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Craft et al., 2016; Gurley et al., 2015; Harris, 2020; Hausman et al., 2002; Lester et al, 2011; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Marshall & Phelps, 2016; Parfitt & Rose, 2020; Ryan, 2011; Searby et al., 2017; Spillane & Lee, 2014). The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership capacity development. A secondary purpose was to learn if participants perceived that race had any impact on their ability to serve successfully in the role. Data analysis revealed that relationship, not race, was the primary driver needed for a successful mentoring relationship. Data also supports a positive perceived relationship between mentoring and improved leadership capacity and self-confidence for Black female assistant principals. Findings and implications could aid school districts, policymakers, and principal preparation program leaders with establishing and diversifying practices and/or programs to strengthen the leadership capacity and confidence of Black female assistant principals.

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General Audience Abstract

The role of an assistant principal is both challenging and multifaceted. The role of an assistant principal who is both Black and female is compounded as this demographic of leaders must navigate both the present demands of the position and racial stressors that often cause low self-confidence and feelings of inadequacy (Robinson, 2014). This study investigated the perspectives of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership capacity development. Additionally, the researcher aimed to learn if participants perceived that race had any impact on their ability to serve successfully in the role.

Data analysis revealed that relationship, not race, was the primary driver needed for a successful mentoring relationship. Data also supported a positive perceived relationship between mentoring and improved leadership capacity and self-confidence for Black female assistant principals. Findings and implications could aid school districts, policymakers, and principal preparation program leaders with establishing and diversifying practices and/or programs to strengthen the leadership capacity and confidence of Black female assistant principals.

Dedication

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

-Joshua 1:9

I dedicate my dissertation process and research to the wonderfully supportive sisters of Black Women Education Leaders, Inc. (BWEL) for your tireless efforts to keep me inspired, full of hope, and full of joy. I dedicate this labor of love, in its entirety, to Black women education leaders across the world. I see you; I hear you; I *am* you. Ubuntu.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview of the Study

The research topic examined the experiences of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' leadership capacity and self-confidence through a qualitative study. The study aimed to learn the perceived impact of effective assistant principal mentorships and leadership capacity and confidence improvement for Black female assistant principals. A secondary purpose was to learn if participants perceived that race had any impact on their ability to serve successfully in the role.

The singular research question guiding this study was: How do current or past serving Black female assistant principals perceive the effectiveness of their mentorship experiences on their leadership development and self-confidence to perform in the role as assistant principal? The sub question for the study was: Do Black female assistant principals indicate that their race and/or gender had any impact on their ability to perform in their roles successfully?

The goal of this study is to increase and expand the level of understanding about mentoring impacts for assistant principals, particularly, Black females. Analysis of the data and synthesis of findings from the research may contain district policy implications for new methods of supporting and growing Black female assistant principals (APs) who typically are asked to serve in areas of high poverty and need (Jang & Alexander, 2022). For this reason, local school districts could benefit from centering the voices and perspectives of Black female assistant principals regarding their professional needs (Jean-Marie, 2013; Olow, 2021). Districts that intentionally investigate and design ways in which they can better support Black female assistant principals to principalship will create a stronger succession plan for their district's pipeline of minority leaders (Jean-Marie, 2013; Moore, 2013; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018).

Statement of the Problem

The role and experiences of assistant principals are almost nonexistent in present research (Oleszewski et al., 2012). In addition, there are no current data providing the current number of assistant principals serving in America's public schools. Data exists for the number and percentage distribution of private and public-school principals as late as 2021; however, there is no such report on assistant principals (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022a). The most current data for principals are disaggregated by gender, race, school level, years of experience, age, and years of service prior to becoming a school principal. Those data can be aggregated with additional data points to make necessary modifications to principal training, mentoring, and to support and make resource provisions to improve practices, processes, and outcomes (Goldring et al., 2021). Assistant principals have no such data to make any meaningful changes to leadership development approaches, with last reported data on assistant principal numbers and distribution submitted in 2016 (Goldring et al., 2021). This lack of data further amplifies the claim that assistant principals are absent from present research.

Assistant principals are associated with every aspect of student life including academic outcomes through instructional leadership, disciplinary outcomes and safety via enforcement of school-wide and district policies, and student affairs via oversight, planning, and coordination for evening and school-day activities and events (Bukoski et al., 2015; Carpenter et al., 2017; Hayes, 2019; Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Winemiller, 2019). A recent Wallace Foundation study (Goldring et al., 2021) described the number of assistant principals as steadily increasing over the past 25 years; however, current research lacks in how to best support these school leaders. As federal and state mandates and demands increase resulting in added academic accountability measures,

as well as the need to holistically support the mental and emotional needs of students, the assistant principalship role is one to be examined and better supported (Goldring et al., 2021).

Additionally, regarding this research study, limited studies exist to describe the needs and challenges of Black female assistant principals. A growing body of research recommends the need to find ways to increase Black female AP leadership influence and to sustain their presence in public schools as a nation-wide imperative to improve their effectiveness (Burton et al., 2020; Edwards, 2016; Jang & Alexander, 2022; McClary, 2019; Olow, 2021). Moyer and Goldring (2023) confirmed the assertion with their quantitative data analysis study of the connection between AP roles in Tennessee and their formal evaluation system. Using Ordinary Least Square regression to analyze the 2019 Tennessee Educator Survey, annual Tennessee state data, and the National Center for Education Statistics data sets (NCES) the researchers determined a connection between AP roles and their perceptions of the fairness of their evaluation system as well as implications specifically for Black APs (Moyer & Goldring, 2023). Moyer and Goldring concluded that Black APs in general and most urban APs of large districts, specifically those serving large populations of students labeled economically disadvantaged, must spend more time on instructional leadership than any White APs who reportedly spend more time on student affairs dependent upon work placement and location. The type of intensive instructional support to serve high-needs populations will require leaders that are highly skilled, competent, and effective in their ability to lead (Moyer & Goldring, 2023).

An existing need to better support, affirm, and retain all APs is crucial for leadership succession within a district (Moyer & Goldring, 2023). Currently, the growing number of students of color in America's public schools are in need of additional academic and emotional support and this requires a level of stability and continuity of diverse and relatable school leaders

within a school building (Goldring et al., 2021). Research also confirms that racial representation matters to a student body, improving and increasing student self-confidence or efficacy and willingness to perform at optimal academic levels for students of color (Edwards, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016; Grissom et al., 2017; Jang & Alexander 2022; Lomotey, 2019; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015; Robinson, 2014). Without adequate district-level support for Black female APs to build their confidence and capacity, student achievement for some of our students with the highest needs could remain stagnant (Goldring, 2021; Moyer & Goldring, 2023). Increasing mentoring as a means of support for Black female assistant principals could lead to greater sustainability and consistency within a school creating a strong pipeline of instructional leaders ready to serve the needs of some of our most vulnerable populations of students across the country as future principals (Jackson et al., 2021; Jean-Marie, 2013; Moore, 2013; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018).

Significance of the Study

Black women are a small population of the education leadership demographic, yet they have made noteworthy contributions to the field of education (Lomotey, 2019; Carpenter et al., 2017; Edwards, 2016; McClary, 2019). Lomotey surveyed the various contributions of Black women in education over the past 25 years to determine the level of impact on student achievement outcomes. Citing case and quantitative studies from a variety of dissertations, articles, and books, Lomotey concluded that Black female principals are *transformational* in their leadership--a highly effective form of leadership that creates long-lasting change. An intense sense of spirituality and *urbanicity*, which is the propensity to work in urban school districts with high challenges, increases their level of grit. Increased *urbanicity* equips Black female principals as capable of working well in demanding situations (Lomotey, 2019).

The pressure and stress that is caused from working in demanding school environments cannot be overlooked (Armstrong, 2015; Bukoski et al., 2015; Burton et al., 2020; Jean-Marie, 2013; Moore, 2013; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). As Black female APs make effort to maintain collegiality in school districts where males dominate school leadership and White females are the predominant teacher workforce, they may experience feelings of inadequacy, incompetency, and isolation (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Harris, 2020; Lomotey, 2019; McClary, 2019; Randolph, 2015). As public-school populations shift demographically, any examination of practices and methods that can improve the leadership capacity of Black school leaders should be considered to support diverse learners (Grissom et al., 2021). The exigency of Black school leaders to connect, relate, and comprehend the needs of students of color can lead to lower disciplinary suspensions (Grissom et al., 2017; Lomotey, 2019). As a result, decreased truancy from suspensions can improve and lead to greater student academic performance and achievement (Grissom et al., 2017). Black women education leaders have had success in providing a conducive school climate focused on collectivism, culturally responsive pedagogical practices, and greater inclusion methods in America's schools and districts (Lomotey, 2019).

Justification of the Study

Research suggests that when mentored, Black women are highly effective in motivating and improving behavioral performance as well as academic outcomes for students of color, students living in poverty, and students who are marginalized (Edwards, 2016; Grissom et al., 2017; Jang & Alexander 2022; Lomotey, 2019; Robinson, 2014). Jang and Alexander investigated the relationship between Black female principals and improved student achievement. Using the 9th-grade student data from the 2009 *High School Longitudinal Studies* taken from the NCES, the researchers conducted a multiple regression analysis and mixed effect

modeling to examine the impact of 26 Black female principals on student achievement (CITE)t. The sample size for the quantitative study was 21,444 9th graders in 944 schools varying in ethnicity, race, gender, and/or socioeconomic status. The researcher's findings denote that Black women principals were able to impact higher math achievement scores compared to White principals (both male and female) for all students, not just Black or students of color. As student diversity within school districts continues to increase there will be a need for more diverse school leadership to support students and teachers in navigating cultural relevance and culturally responsive pedagogy. Expanding mentorship and development opportunities for Black female assistant principals could prove to be a viable conduit (Bailes & Guthery, 2020).

In addition to serving students academically, Black female school leaders are cited to improve overall school culture and climate (Carpenter et al., 2017; Grissom et al., 2017; Jang & Alexander, 2022; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). Newcomb and Niemeyer held a 120-minute, qualitative focus group of three Black female principals to observe their impact on urban school communities. The study findings showed that those principal's spirituality and a keen sense of urgency to improve conditions led to longer terms in their principalship and a resolve to make a difference in the emotional and social well-being of the students they serve. The three principals all reported the use of compassion and considering the home circumstances of students in assigning disciplinary consequences. Students who are not repeatedly suspended from school are in class learning and as a result, improving their academic performance and outcomes (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015).

Having principals who understand cultural differences and know how to support students in demanding situations will produce greater student success (Grissom et al., 2017, 2021). Learning the perceptions of Black female assistant principal experiences with mentoring to

support their confidence and leadership growth could change the landscape of current issues in public schools from academic achievement gaps to disproportionate disciplinary responses (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). Mullen (2017) advocated, in her list of five recommendations surrounding critical issues of mentoring, for the increase in “perceptions” and more education about the “role, process, quality, and benefits” of mentoring as she notes the value mentoring adds to leaders (p. 47). Using mentoring support as an avenue to better train and develop Black female APs could prove beneficial for school districts in terms of retention and succession planning (Goldring, 2021; Moyer & Goldring, 2023). Creating intentional mentoring-dyad partnerships that speak to the needs of Black female assistant principals is a cost-effective measure that can be included in current district principal succession academies and programs (Jean-Marie, 2013; Moore, 2013; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018).

Conceptual Framework

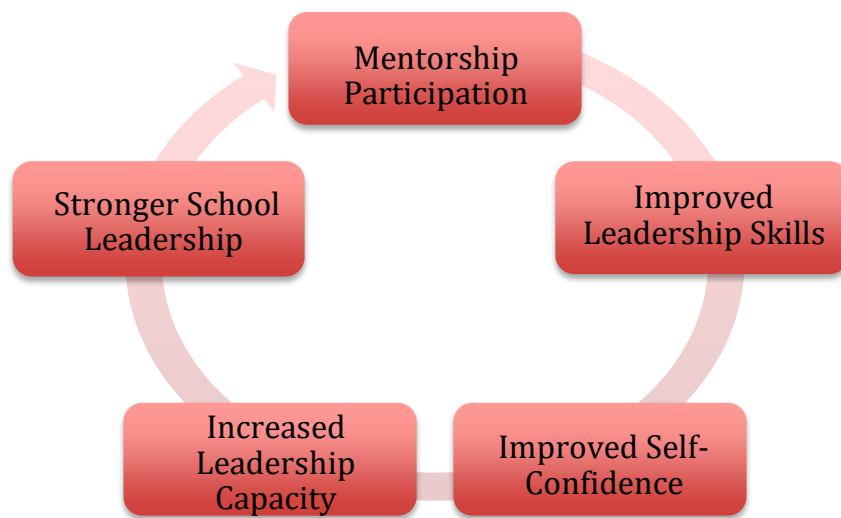
The singular research question for the proposed study was generated from a review of the literature concerning assistant principal perceptions of mentoring, challenges of the role of the assistant principal, assistant principal leadership development, and assistant principal confidence. While there is literature to support mentoring for teachers and school principals, there are few studies regarding assistant principal mentoring to build AP capacity, improve confidence, and on its effectiveness and ability to help APs make impactful change in schools (Searby et al., 2017). Even less studies exist on Black female assistant principal leadership and confidence development through mentoring, although, Black school administrators statistically are asked to serve in schools with students from a lower-socioeconomic background, bilingual homes, and/or in crime-ridden areas (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Jang & Alexander, 2022; Lomotey, 2019). The review of the literature did identify informal mentoring and effective mentorship programs as

quintessential leadership provisions for minority school leaders that a district can provide (Allen et al., 1995; McClary, 2019; Robinson, 2014). As a result, a sub-question as well as a conceptual framework was developed to loop the potential of mentorship relationships with improved Black female assistant principal confidence and leadership capacity. Miles et al. (2020) contend that a conceptual framework is a “map” of the researcher’s area of focus as they determine what is most imperative to advance the study as well as the significance of essential relationships (p. 15).

Figure 1, *Perception of Mentoring on Black Female Assistant Principal Confidence and Leadership: A Conceptual Framework*, an amalgamation of this focus, is the conceptual framework for the proposed research study.

Figure 1

Perception of Mentoring on Black Female Assistant Principal Confidence and Leadership: A Conceptual Framework



A total of 42/89 or 47.1% of the references used in this research study advocate for increased mentoring for assistant principals in their implications and recommendation sections. In 17 out of 89 (19.1%) references, state and local legislators and higher institution leadership certification programs, are called upon to examine present professional development more

closely for assistant principals. It is important to take inventory of the root causes of Black female AP burnout, resignation, and/or failure to ascend to the principalship (if desired), after years of service to establish more equitable leadership development practices (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Burton et al., 2020; Carpenter et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013). The Maine Department of Education (2023) in collaboration with the Maine Principal Association outlines the impact of its principal and assistant principal mentoring process, which has led to a vital succession plan across the state.

Improved leadership skill development could lead to an increase in effectiveness, leadership capacity, and confidence for Black female APs as they begin to self-actualize and hone their newly established leadership skills (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Harris, 2020; McClary, 2019; Randolph, 2015). Confidence improvement has the capacity to positively impact school culture and a school leader's level of effectiveness with teachers since leaders serve as change agents and influencers within schools (Fullan, 2014). High quality assistant principals are generally tapped to become building principals in a district with a sustainable succession pipeline (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Gurley et al., 2015; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Zepeda et al., 2012). As a building principal, fully equipped and ready to serve, former Black female APs can rejoin the cycle as mentoring program participants who are able to impart knowledge and strengthen the next generation of incoming school leaders.

Researcher's Professional Background and Assumptions

The researcher's background and curiosity in the perceived benefits and challenges of effective mentoring for Black female assistant principals ground this study. Her current position as a former Black female assistant principal of six years within three different school settings: urban, suburban, and rural, for both middle and high schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia

provide the basis for her inquiry. As a nonprofit Executive Director and Founder of a national organization committed to building the capacity of Black female educators and those aspiring to become leaders, she holds an entrenched desire to remove barriers to access for Black female leaders aspiring to enter leadership positions within the field of education. As a current School Quality Specialist at the Virginia Department of Education, she further supports building leaders of all walks of life (both male and female) across the Commonwealth, as they strive to continuously improve their schools.

As a result, this research study is both related to her current external passions as well as her day-to-day position as a school improvement specialist and coach for school and district leaders. The researcher's background, perspectives, and assumptions were inevitably factors throughout the process of conducting the study and required constant monitoring. For example, an assumption can be made that all Black female assistant principals need mentors to thrive in their current positions. It can be assumed that all Black females' experiences have been or will be the same within their respective school buildings. The researcher had to intentionally monitor assumptions to be objective in accurate analysis and interpretation of the data from the study participants. The learning intention, therefore, was to conduct the research to learn about the perceived impact of mentoring for Black female assistant principals in multiple K-12 settings to add to the literature and encourage future research in this topic. The learning intention grounded and focused this study.

Definition of Terms

The terms and definitions listed in Table 1 are essential to the proposed study.

Table 1

Definition of Terms

Term	Definition
AP	<i>AP</i> is an acronym used interchangeably with the phrase assistant principals.
Culturally Responsive Practices (CRP)	<i>Culturally responsive practices</i> stem from the work of Ladson-Billings (2021), whose framework, culturally responsive pedagogy, charges educators to invest in practices that yield high-academic outcomes for all students, develop student’s ethnic and cultural identities through curriculum and instruction, and seek restorative and alternative ways to handle school discipline.
Epigenetics	<i>Epigenetics</i> is the study of gene activation. Scientists have found that trauma experienced within an ancestry line can impact a current person’s behaviors and DNA for multiple generations (DeGruy, 2017).
Hyper-Vigilance	<i>Hyper-vigilance</i> is the state of being always extremely alert impacting the nervous system, relationships with others, and sleep patterns. DeGruy (2017) notes that prolonged exposure to ongoing negative situations creates these anxiety symptoms, which are a response to trauma, fear, and threatening environments.
Inferiority Status	<i>Inferiority status</i> is the intersection between being Black in a majority White nation and being a woman in a male-dominated society (Crenshaw, 1989).
Intersectionality	<i>Intersectionality</i> is an extension of the ways in which feminist social statuses intercept (i.e., Black and female; White, female, and queer; Asian, female, and transgender; Latino, female, and handicapped) (Crenshaw, 1989).
Leader Efficacy	<i>Leader efficacy</i> is the confidence or self-confidence measurement that is associated with how a leader sees themselves and the explicit benefits for the leader (CITE).
Leadership Efficacy	<i>Leadership efficacy</i> is a phenomenon that includes both the leader and follower. An increase in leadership confidence often results in improved productivity for the followers (CITE).
Macro- or Micro-Aggression	Coined by Dr. Chester Pierce, <i>macro-</i> or <i>micro-aggression</i> is any verbal or nonverbal slight that offends someone who is considered from a marginalized or non-mainstream group (Crenshaw, 1989).
Marginalized	<i>Marginalized</i> refers to any group of people who have been historically oppressed or <i>othered</i> (DeGruy, 2017).
Positionality	<i>Positionality</i> means positioning yourself by “identification in relation to the context and setting of the research” study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21).
Self-Efficacy/Self-Confidence	<i>Self-efficacy</i> or <i>self-confidence</i> refers to the belief in one’s abilities to do or perform a job or task successfully; confidence (Jackson et al., 2021; Lester et al., 2011).

Note. The terms female and woman (or women) may be used interchangeable throughout this study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 serves as an overview of the present study. Chapter 2 is a literature review of existing research on mentoring impacts in the workplace, in educational leadership, and on mentorships specifically designed with Black female school leaders in mind. Chapter 3 comprises the researcher's methodology of the study and will include the design of the study, qualitative approach to inquiry, interpretative framework, data collection procedures, and proposed data analysis. Chapter 4 includes the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 will frame the study's major themes, findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The research topic examines the perception of impact of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' confidence and leadership capacity. The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership capacity development. A secondary purpose was to learn if participants perceived that race had any impact on their ability to serve successfully in the role.

The literature review centers on the current roles and responsibilities of assistant principals as well as the present challenges of the AP position. A review of the literature regarding general workplace mentoring and its perceived impact on leaders in industry discusses implications for education leaders. Improvement for leaders' confidence and leadership development was evidenced in the literature (Eby & Robertson, 2020; Irby, 2015; Jernigan et al., 2020; Lester et al., 2011). The exploration of this relationship is important to better understand the perceptions, behaviors, and communication that impacts practicing assistant principals in their leadership journeys (Bickmore & Davenport, 2019; Creswell, 2018; Jones & Larwin, 2015; Sun & Shoho, 2017).

Additional literature on mentoring led to benefits for improving work conditions for APs as their leadership capacity and confidence are enhanced through collegial partnerships (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Harris, 2020; Jackson et al., 2021; McClary, 2019; Randolph, 2015). Black female assistant principals, the primary focus of this research study, stand to benefit from collegial partnerships that encourage them, build their skill sets, and make strides toward building level principalships and beyond (Olow, 2021). The recent challenges with social injustice and unrest, rising poverty levels, and political uncertainty are only exacerbated in environments where Black female APs tend to receive placement in school districts across the

country (Diem & Welton, 2021; Grissom et al., 2017; Jang & Alexander 2022; Lomotey, 2019). As a result, there exists a need to better develop these leaders who are managing challenging environments, situations, and a multitude of stakeholders daily (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Armstrong, 2015; Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Bartanen et al., 2021; Goldring et al., 2021; Harris, 2020; Olow, 2020; Randolph, 2015; Robinson, 2014; Searby et al., 2017; Stewart, 2016; Sun & Shoho, 2017; Tarbutton, 2019; Williams, 2019). A continued search of the literature yielded limited research studies focused on improving assistant principal leadership and confidence and even fewer focused on the leadership and confidence of Black females serving as APs.

The organization of this research paper stems from emergent themes from the review of the literature seen in Table 2. The identified themes were mentoring improves leadership capacity and confidence for leaders in industry, mentoring (formal/informal) improves leadership capacity and confidence for instructional leaders, and mentoring improves leadership capacity and confidence for Black female instructional leaders. These themes were instrumental in narrowing the focus of the research study.

Table 2

Emergent Themes From the Literature Review

Number	Theme
1	Mentoring improves leadership capacity and confidence for leaders in industry
2	Mentoring (formal/informal) improves leadership capacity and confidence for instructional leaders
3	Mentoring improves leadership capacity and confidence for Black female instructional leaders

Literature Review Search Process

The review of the literature covers current research studies dedicated to furthering the conversation around the evolving role of the assistant principal, the current challenges of the position, and the need for policy reform at the higher education level, district level, and state level to improve workplace conditions and support for assistant principals. A wide-ranging search of the literature was conducted via the Virginia Tech Online Library search engine, Google Scholar, and JSTOR via Hanover County Public Schools' employee access. All research, which was added to a literature review matrix, was relevant to the area of focus. K

Keywords/phrases used to initiate the review of the literature include *assistant principal mentoring, principals mentoring assistant principals, black women advancing in school leadership, the role of sisterhood in retaining Black female school leaders, assistant principal preparation, Black female assistant principals, barriers for Black women to the principalship, principals as mentors to assistant principals, assistant principal confidence, building assistant principal capacity, and preparing the assistant principal*. Without any limiters, the initial search of the above noted terms returned millions of potential sources. The reviewer used a Boolean search with a date limiter of 2013-2022 as well as the additional limiter of peer-reviewed/full text to distinguish and more narrowly define the parameters.

Exceptions were made for 10 research studies that provide historical background and context. Searches were conducted between August 2021 and March 2023. The research was added to three organizational management systems: (a) Mendeley, (b) a database search spreadsheet, and (c) a literature review matrix. Overall, a total of 89 peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and books were examined for this literature review, distilled from 96 abstracts reviewed. The literature review matrix contained relevant research from the literature review

concerning mentoring, mentoring relationships for assistant principals, and perceived mentoring impact for Black female assistant principals. The matrix was color-coded according to how the researcher intended to make use of the studies throughout the literature review and for the preliminary examination. Direct and meaningful quotes are cited in red throughout the Literature Review Table.

Examining the Role that Assistant Principals Serve

School-based assistant principals serve a complex role in today's schools. The nature of the position requires that K-12 assistant principals manage a myriad of challenges and responsibilities daily (Hausman et al., 2002; Hunt, 2011; Searby et al., 2017; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Swain, 2016). As a result of the challenges faced daily, assistant principals require highly adaptive "social, technical, and leadership skills" (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991, p. 73) as they attempt to address and respond to the needs and demands, of students, teachers, parents, principals, school district leaders, and other stakeholders (Marshall & Phelps, 2016; Paskey, 1989; Searby et al., 2017; Swain, 2016). In addition, assistant principals need to understand the nuances and hard skills associated with school level leadership (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Spillane and Lee assert that some assistant principals do not aspire to move into the principal seat due to a general lack of knowledge of some of the most essential duties of a building principal such as school budget and facilities management. The time assistant principals devote to other, seemingly more pressing matters, such as teacher conflicts, student discipline, and parent demands consume the time needed to learn and grow in other areas (Marshall & Phelps, 2016).

In 2022, Rushing conducted a qualitative analysis study to garner the perceptions of five assistant principals in Alabama as it relates to Alabama's assistant principal internship policy. Rushing wanted to know if greater social learning and field experiences could be more

meaningful for aspiring school leaders. Currently, in the state of Alabama, aspiring assistant principals must intern for 10 days within a public school for fulfillment of their administrative and supervision certification. An educational leadership student's 10 days must be equally split between elementary and high school, resulting in five days at each site for the internship. Findings revealed that all participants of the study who were interviewed in individual semi-structured interviews, believed policy change should occur to shift less of the time spent in coursework and more time in the field to gain the experience needed to fulfill obligations of the job including instructional leadership, data analysis, and managing adult behaviors. Rushing did note that the small sample size and mixed perceptions from males and females did have limitations and require additional research to validate the study. Also noted in current research are gaps in finance, facilities management, and policy knowledge, which leads to feelings of reduced effectiveness and confidence for assistant principals (Swain, 2016).

The assistant principal role, development, and expectations are often “under-represented” in education leadership literature (Oleszewski et al., 2012, p. 1). Assistant principals serve as second-in-command to the building principal, the chief education leader of a school (Barnett et al., 2017). This ranking as second-in-command may complicate the breadth and responsibilities of the assistant principal as less emphasis is typically placed on further development since the role is often temporal (Zepeda et al., 2012). Oleszewski et al. (2012), wrote a review of the literature surrounding the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal, accessing primarily 20 empirical research studies between 1970 and 2011. Oleszewski et al. (2012) concluded with a recommendation that the role of assistant principal needs to be “reconfigured” since it is so varied across schools, districts, and states (p. 18).

In most schools, the school principal typically delegates an assistant principal's roles, responsibilities, and expectations within a school building (Goldring et al., 2021). Consequently, the roles and responsibilities of most assistant principals are arbitrary in school districts nationwide. A lack of clearly defined role expectations and responsibilities adds an additional burden to assistant principals who may change districts due to relocation and other varied reasons. In agreement with the work of Oleszewski et al. (2012), Goldring et al. questioned the significance of the assistant principal role in their meta-analysis study of administrative data in Tennessee and Pennsylvania public schools. The researchers' search process included eight coded studies of peer-reviewed and unpublished data from quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies. Data included the Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Surveys (SASS/NTPS) gathered from 1987–1988 through 2015–2016.

The study emphasized that the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) was designed for both principals and assistant principals alike, leaving the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal at the hands of a building administrator who is the primary supervisor (Goldring et al., 2021). The title of second-in-command, thus, is not only used to describe assistant principals within the schools where they serve, but also throughout the district central offices, where human resources directors help to define the role in job descriptions. A review of job descriptions concluded that the assistant principal's role is primarily to “assist” and “support” a building leader (p. 56) leaving more ambiguity and lack of clarity regarding the role (Goldring et al., 2021).

Developing Assistant Principals for Better Succession Planning

As head instructional leaders, building principals are provided with both essential and timely professional development to help guide and steer teachers and students to success

(Oleszewski et al, 2012; Searby et al., 2017). Unfortunately, assistant principals may or may not receive the same level of training, leaving some to feel inadequate in their roles as they understand them (Searby et al., 2017). Searby et al. examined practicing APs in the state of Alabama by hosting six focus groups in conjunction with issuing an online survey for a mixed-methods study. The survey was issued to 1,150 assistant principals in Alabama and yielded 461 usable surveys between October 2013 and April 2014. The findings of Searby et al. revealed that within their first five years of service, assistant principals not only desired mentorship but also felt inadequately prepared to serve in the role of school principals in the future ($N=200$). Searby et al. concluded that a disconnect between existing assistant principal knowledge and present assistant principal expectations (as identified through standards) may exist.

Districts benefit when assistant principals aspire to become building leaders, taking over for principals who retire, resign, or relocate (Williams, 2019; Zepeda et al., 2012). Institutional knowledge remains, parents and community members are familiar with the leadership, and money is saved by districts not having to rehire, retrain, and develop new, incoming administrators (Williams, 2019). Therefore, preparing assistant principals through comprehensive succession planning is essential (Barnett et al., 2017; Hayes, 2019; Williams, 2019). The assistant principal is typically the successor to a principal in the education hierarchy (Zepeda et al., 2012). Zepeda et al. conducted a multi-case study with semi-structured interviews of four school systems in the state of Georgia. Over four months of data collection yielded 32 interviews and amassed several artifacts from superintendents, central office administration, human resources directors, and school principals from elementary to secondary levels. Their findings revealed that districts that invest in their assistant principals' leadership skills had more adequately prepared succession management plans for schools when building leaders retired,

resigned, or had to step down for several reasons. The large, urban school system desired the strongest, most comprehensive succession plan as the needs within their district were deemed imminent and high. Zepeda et al. (2012) wrote that participants expressed a “sense of urgency” in ensuring that the school principals must be among the most well-prepared and experienced to handle the challenges within the district--the stakes being too high in terms of student performance and achievement (p. 9).

Previous studies, like that of Zepeda et al. (2012), have ranked principal effectiveness as an essential contributor to improved student achievement. Grissom et al. (2021) restated the assertion that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning” (Louis et al., 2010, p. 9, as cited in Grissom et al., 2021). Louis et al. conducted a methodological study to gain new perspectives. Of 43 school districts and 180 elementary through high schools across nine U.S. states, Louis et al. found that no successful school with improved student achievement existed without a transformational principal. Transformational leaders develop a collaborative culture and can best support their staff and faculty at schools as a result (Louis et al., 2010). After conducting a similar study, Grissom et al. (2021) supported the claim regarding student achievement being linked to transformational principal effectiveness. The researchers conducted a review of over 4,800 quantitative, qualitative, and mixed study reviews distilled to 219 after screening for relevance and coding according to methodological design. Six studies from middle and elementary schools of over 22,000 principals revealed that increasing principal effectiveness by just one standard deviation or the equivalent of a principal shifting in effectiveness from 50th to 84th percentile, resulted in statistically significant achievement increases in math and reading (Grissom et al., 2021).

If effective school leadership has any level of influence on student outcomes, it is likely that additional research studies will emerge to provide insight into ways to strengthen the role of assistant principals who may aspire to become building leaders (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Grissom et al., 2021; Hunt, 2011; Stewart, 2016; Swain, 2016). Assistant principals are the second-in-command to a building principal within a school (Goldring et al., 2021). They jointly share accountability with the building principal for student and teacher success within a school building (Cohen & Schechter, 2019a). While cited research asserts that effective principal leadership is essential (Oleszewski et al., 2012), the assistant principal requires adequate training and support to be prepared to not only aid in the leadership, but also to make strides toward the principalship. Assistant principal ascension is critical for the sustainment of a viable succession pipeline within a school district (Zepeda et al., 2012). Establishing effective mentoring programs in school districts may be a key instrument in strengthening the assistant principal role and leadership capacity (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Barnett et al., 2017; Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Hayes, 2019; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Ryan, 2011; Stewart, 2016; Sun, 2018; Williams, 2019, Zepeda et al., 2012).

Workplace Mentoring to Improve Confidence and Performance

A *workplace mentor* has been defined as someone with a level of expertise in a field, trade, or skill who decides to provide guidance and support to someone aspiring to operate similarly (Robnett et al., 2018). Through research, scholars have cited effective mentoring and mentorship programs as a major success variable for those in the private sector and other leadership fields (Eby & Robertson, 2020; Irby, 2015; Jernigan et al., 2020). Lester et al.'s (2011) empirical study using an experimental design of a pilot mentoring program sought to debunk the research that asserts there is no benefit in formalized mentoring programs within an

organization. Their findings could prove to be essential for school districts seeking to build the capacity of all their leaders—both mentees and mentors alike, in a cost-effective way.

Conducting a longitudinal field study, Lester et al. (2011) designed and implemented a pilot mentorship program with a treatment group participating in a 1:1 formal mentoring program and a control group participating in a more generalized training program over a six-month period. Demographic data and leader confidence levels were collected at what the researchers refer to as *Time 1*. Referred to as *Time 2* served as the intervention period for the study (the 6-month period) and referred to as *Time 3* was the post-study collection of performance ratings to make their final determinations from the data. The organization identified and the researchers selected 499 cadets to participate in the pilot program; however, it is worth noting that program participation was mandatory, while study involvement was not. As a result, the research sample group was reduced to 193 cadets (White males) with 117 in the control group and 76 in the treatment group (Lester et al., 2011).

The researchers developed a conceptual framework to test four hypotheses to determine the impact of mentoring on a leader's efficacy and overall performance. Using ANCOVA in the SPSS data system, the four hypotheses, paraphrased in Table 3, were tested.

Table 3

Four Hypotheses of Mentoring to Improve Leadership Efficacy

Hypothesis label	Hypothesis
Hypothesis 1a & b	Participating in a leadership mentorship intervention will increase leader efficacy.
Hypothesis 2	Leaders who trust their mentors will have higher levels of efficacy development.
Hypothesis 3	Levels of leadership development will impact how proteges receive negative feedback.
Hypothesis 4	Leaders' confidence will be positively related to their (self) leader performance ratings.

The data showed a positive relationship between those who were mentored on a 1:1 basis as well as increased efficacy and leader performance as indicated by supervising staff ($r = .15, p < .05$) (CITE). Three of the researchers' central findings from the 6-month period, *Time 3*, are worth noting and are relevant to the remainder of this literature review: (a) a semi-formal mentorship training program did have a significant and measurable impact on leader efficacy development (b) mentoring proved effective and beneficial as a means of developing leaders; and (c) using current leaders of an organization as mentors documented improvement for mentors as their skills were strengthened through the mentorship program's professional development (Lester et al., 2011, p. 17). The data may have implications for leadership programs and organizations, including the field of education.

Research yielded similar outcomes from studies adding to the literature on the improvement of a leader's efficacy because of participation in mentoring. Dwyer (2019), who also cited the work of Lester et al. (2011), reviewed over 25 years of research on leadership efficacy measurement tools, and concluded citing Bandura's (1977) cognitive modeling techniques through mentoring and training in constructive thought patterns contributed to improved efficacy for leaders. Dwyer asserts that past leadership confidence tools evaluated *leader efficacy*; however, *leadership efficacy* is a phenomenon that involves both leaders and followers and as a leader's confidence improves it benefits those under the direction of their leadership and not just the leaders themselves.

While mentoring has been noted as effective for confidence development (regardless of gender) when planned, intentional, and purposeful, findings from similar research studies hold other notable implications. Scholars assert that women could be the greatest beneficiaries of mentoring programs, especially in historically male-dominated fields (Harris, 2020; Lester et al.,

2011; McClary, 2019). Allen et al. (1995) asserted that historically it has been difficult for women of any color, religion, or creed to ascend to leadership or executive positions since it was believed that women did not possess the skills to lead effectively. As a result, it is believed that women will benefit from mentoring because leadership roles and expectations have traditionally been upheld by and designed for men, leaving a skill void for most women (Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021).

Mcilongo and Strydom (2021) conducted a quantitative study in South Africa of 200 women in the public sector. The research instrument was a 25-question questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale tested for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. Their findings from the survey statement from Hypothesis one, *A mentoring policy will encourage the career advancement of women* yielded a high standard ($M = 4.32$) indicated that a mentoring program could have a positive impact on a woman's career advancement. Hypothesis two, *Career support and career advancement*, of the same study, produced Pearson's chi-square test of association with $p = 0.000$, at $p\chi(1) = 490.009$, concluding that mentoring could play a significant role in a woman's career ascension at work.

Effective mentorship programs and informal mentors have also been credited with aiding in job promotion, increasing job satisfaction, and providing workers with a greater sense of purpose in their work (Eby & Robertson, 2020). According to a recent CNBC/SurveyMonkey Workplace Happiness Survey, workers who were mentored reported feeling more optimistic about a job promotion, purpose at work, and their job placement/positions (Dauble & Gharib, 2019). The online poll survey took a random sampling of 7,940 participants. The data indicated that of the 51% of participants who were mentored 95% of them experienced job satisfaction. Additionally, 71% of the mentored participants were more likely to feel positive about promotion

and/or advancement at work. Also, of those mentored, 79% of total participants felt they were paid well and only 25% of those mentored had considered quitting in the last three months (Dauble & Gharib, 2019). These data could suggest a relationship between mentoring, positive feelings and outlook, and improved confidence, which could increase job satisfaction.

Workplace Mentoring Challenges

As promising as informal mentoring and mentoring programs may seem, researchers also acknowledge the potential pitfalls of an ineffective or poorly constructed program (Eby & Robertson, 2020; Hu et al., 2022; Leitner et al., 2018; Robnett et al., 2018). Leitner et al. sought to test the validity of interracial mentorships being ineffective due to a lack of rapport and rapport building. The researchers noted that factors such as stereotypes, prejudices, distress, and anxiety made some interracial mentorships difficult. To combat these negative outcomes from mentoring, the scholars recommend that mentorship program developers collaborate closely with selected mentors to strengthen cultural awareness and understanding. They also insist that mentorship coordinators teach both mentees and mentors to *self-disclose* as a means of trust-building (Leitner et al., 2018). Utilizing *self-disclosure* as a tool during interracial mentoring proved to have significant positive outcomes for White and minority dyads as well as minority and minority dyads (Hu et al., 2022; Leitner et al., 2018).

Self-disclosure, or revealing one's feelings to another, and rapport building proved to be essential components of mentoring practices in China as well. In a quantitative multiple regression study, Hu et al. (2022) noted that previous negative experiences with mentoring stemming from low rapport building and an inability of mentors and mentees to attempt *ego-depletion* (known in the United States as the ability to *self-disclose*) lead to ineffective current mentoring relationships. The scholars analyzed data from mentors and mentees who had engaged

in mentorships in the past to learn how previous experiences were impacting current relationships between mentors and mentees. Other variables such as inappropriate personality and/or professional aspiration matching, lack of expertise in mentoring, and reported “tyrannical” attitudes of mentors toward mentees also contributed to negative mentoring outcomes from participants. The researchers’ concluding recommendation was for mentoring program leaders to ensure that mentors receive adequate training, particularly in how to *self-disclose* and build rapport naturally. They also propose that mentors and mentees be appropriately matched. Their research of 227 proteges, 187 mentors, and 187 mentor supervisors found that proper matching could mitigate the likelihood of negative outcomes due to improper selection techniques (Hu et al., 2022).

The research of Robnett et al. (2018) aligned with that of Hu et al (2022) and Leitner et al. (2018). Using a mixed-methods study, Robnett et al. (2018) evaluated the relationship between 66 undergraduate research apprentices and their assigned mentors to see if scientist identity, or “the degree to which students perceive their science-related pursuits as integral to their sense of self” (p. 2), could or would be improved through mentorship. In their quantitative findings, their hypothesis was supported that mentees or proteges who reported receiving more instrumental (skills and resources development) or socioemotional mentoring also reported higher levels of science identity. Conversely, mentees who conveyed receiving negative mentorship reported lower levels of science identity, potentially linking effective mentoring to increased confidence and improved performance. Of the three associations examined, instrumental mentoring demonstrated the most variance in the subject students’ scientific identity. The scholars did acknowledge that conducting qualitative research only on mentors without including interviews and perspectives from mentees could have impacted the findings

and thus, they encouraged future research to be conducted. Mentees were only issued a quantitative survey; they were not interviewed (Robnett et al, 2018).

Applying Workplace Mentoring in the Education Leadership Field

As was the case in mentoring in other occupational fields, education scholars also affirmed the benefits of mentoring for novice employees. Education researchers have investigated the impact of workplace mentoring and have documented positive outcomes for both male and female-identified groups (Hayes, 2019; Hausman et al., 2002; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Paskey, 1989; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018; Searby et al., 2017; Service et al., 2018; Sun, 2018). Mentoring has been cited as an effective way to combat isolation, feelings of inadequacy, and high-stress leadership positions (Armstrong, 2015; Cohen & Schechter, 2019a, 2019b; Hayes, 2019; Hunt, 2011; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018; Ryan, 2011). Seasoned teachers often serve as mentors to novice, incoming teachers (Hunt, 2011).

Mullen and Klimaitis (2021) composed a working definition of mentoring by conducting an extensive literature review of empirical studies from 1983 to 2019. The scholars asserted that there are nine mentoring alternatives and types: (a) formal, (b) informal, (c) diverse, (d) electronic, (e) co-mentoring/collaborative, (f) group, (g) peer, (h) multilevel, and (i) cultural by which people receive support, guidance, and directive from mentors. The researchers concluded that “mentoring relationships have stood the test of time” thus making mentoring a viable practice to improve employee performance in present day career fields” (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021, p. 14).

Mentoring may be especially useful in a career field like education leadership. Research lists among the top stressors of school leadership to be elevated levels of accountability, long

work hours, and feelings of isolation (Armstrong, 2015; Cohen & Schechter, 2019a, 2019b; Hayes, 2019; Hunt, 2011; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018; Ryan, 2011). Armstrong conducted a qualitative study with a sample group of 4 assistant principals (two females and two males) in Ontario, Canada to identify the stressors of the position. All four participants in the case study noted that they felt their leadership preparation programs inadequately prepared them for the roles they were expected to perform. Armstrong cited that unpredictability, competing demands, and little time to complete tasks were top stressors. The study found that mentoring was identified as a potential solution to provide adequate support and build leadership capacity for assistant principals (Armstrong, 2015).

Research exists in support of informal and formal mentoring as a means to increase assistant principal leadership capacity, confidence, and/or improve student learning outcomes through effective school leadership (Allen et al., 1995; Barnett et al., 2017; Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Craft et al., 2016; Gurley et al., 2015; Harris, 2020; Hausman et al., 2002; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Marshall & Phelps, 2016; Parfitt & Rose, 2020; Ryan, 2011; Searby et al., 2017; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Mentorship is identified in the research as having a positive impact on assistant principal's ascension to the principalship (Bartanen et al., 2021; Craft et al., 2016; Hayes, 2019; Searby et al., 2017). A study revealed that all communities benefit when assistant principals are groomed, cultivated, and prepared to ascend into principalships after a few years of serving in that capacity (Zepeda et al., 2012). This finding indicates that mentoring has positive implications for successful school leadership.

Similar studies throughout the literature noted that workplace stressors for school leaders are indiscriminate among male and female school leaders, indicating that support is needed in the field of education overall (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Hayes, 2019; Hunt, 2011; Ryan, 2011;

Spillane & Lee, 2014; Sun & Shoho, 2017). The expectations of the job and the urgency in knowing that daily encounters, plans, and engagements will impact the lives of generations to come can seem daunting to a school leader (Cohen & Schechter, 2019a; Stewart, 2016). Having a mentor to share concerns, fears, and apprehensions can ease the strain caused by the extraordinary work demands assistant principals encounter each day (Jones & Larwin, 2015).

Jones and Larwin (2015) investigated the impact of a mentoring program in Northeast Ohio called the *Beginning Principal Mentorship Program* in a mixed-methods multi-phase collection study on novice school principals. The researchers solicited principals from 31 school counties receiving final participation from $n=8$ female and $n=11$ male participants. Nine participants were high school principals, five were middle school principals, and another five were elementary school principals ranging in age and district locations (rural, suburban, and urban). Using an open-ended questionnaire and the Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practices Inventory (via coaching sessions) to glean perceptions, participants disclosed that mentoring assured them that they were on the right track in their leadership and provided guidance and clarity to help them deal with complex situations. Of the 19 participants, 73.7% percent (or 14/19) reported that effective and intentional mentoring helped them to successfully navigate the first year as principals (Jones & Larwin, 2015, p. 14). Effective mentoring programs can potentially improve leadership skills, capacity, and confidence for school leaders (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Gurley et al., 2015).

Mentoring is also documented to have a positive impact on the ability for assistant principals to gain promotion as well as on their retention in schools (Bartanen et al., 2021; Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; McClary, 2019; Paskey, 1989). In 2021, Bartanen et al. conducted a descriptive and explanatory *meta-analysis* study of the mobility of assistant

principals in Tennessee and Missouri public rural, suburban, and urban schools. Using *longitudinal* data obtained from Tennessee via the Tennessee Education Research Alliance and from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in Missouri, the researchers examined the yearly mobility rates of assistant principals in both states. The scholars concluded that 7.5% of assistant principals ascended to the principalship in Tennessee and 10% ascended to the principalship in Missouri because of a positive mentoring relationship with their building principals. One of the most compelling findings was that assistant principal ascension occurred regularly whether an existing school principal departed from a position or if an AP chose to pursue principalship in another school/district because of mentoring (Bartanen et al., 2021). This implies that the mentoring and supportive relationships that exist between principals and assistant principals within a school building may have an impact on an assistant principal's mobility and promotion to the principalship.

Key findings throughout the literature affirm Bartanen et al.'s (2021) study, citing in addition to mentoring programs, the school principal is the most effective mentor for assistant principals. Principals can help APs navigate the multiple facets of the job from day to day (Adams et al., 2017; Bartanen et al., 2021; Bickmore & Davenport, 2019; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Swain, 2016; Winemiller, 2019). The absence of effective mentoring partnerships between principals and APs could have negative effects. Spillane and Lee conducted a mixed-methods study of two cohorts of principals in Chicago Public Schools in the fall of 2009 and the fall of 2010. After conducting a data review of observations, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and data from the Consortium on Chicago School Research's biennial surveys, Spillane and Lee asserted that the absence of effective principal leadership and mentoring for assistant principals proved to be a major deterrent to an AP's aspirations to ascend into principal leadership.

Upholding the earlier findings of Spillane and Lee (2014), Swain (2016) reported, “the school principal can play an important role in overseeing the leadership development of their vice-principal” (p. 137). In Swain’s study, using a mixed-methods approach of 15 vice or assistant elementary principals, he found that the positive principal-vice principal relationship had a small, yet statistically significant impact on assistant principal confidence ($r(122) = .224$, $p = .013$). The research findings further assert that a positive relationship between principals and APs, in conjunction with a conducive learning environment, improved assistant principal leadership, which could impact overall student outcomes within a school (Swain, 2016).

A qualitative study by Barnett et al. (2017) found that assistant principals who are mentored by their principals or via informal mentors gained better decision-making skills and increased growth mindset, and as a result improved their performance. Using semi-structured interviews with current practicing assistant principals ($n=69$) in school systems across the southwest region on the United States, Barnett et al. sought out to gain perspective of the effectiveness of mentoring prior to or after being assigned to schools as APs. Two research questions surfaced from their review of literature: 1. Did you have a mentor(s) to help prepare you for your role as an assistant principal? If you did, what advice were you given? 2. What has aided you most in your professional growth as an assistant principal? Barnett et al. proceeded to analyze the data in two stages: a) assembling the data of all respondents and creating codes based on keywords, which amassed 57 codes for question one and 27 for question two, and b) clustering for similarities which resulted in a total of three main themes. After analysis, their findings, in conjunction with their literature review, indicated improved skill development, personal and professional development, and a clarification of values and beliefs resulted from mentoring partnerships with principals and/or informal mentorships regardless of formal versus

informal status. Effective mentoring could help change the trajectory of negative AP sentiment regarding their professional needs. This could contribute to an increase in retention and lead to greater principal succession in the future (Barnett et al., 2017).

Among the findings and conclusions gathered from data, most studies list that principals play a pivotal role in developing assistant principals as future school leaders (Oleszewski et al., 2012; Ryan, 2011; Sun, 2018; Winemiller, 2019). Some studies exist that indicate that some principals are not adequately trained to be effective mentors for the assistant principals they supervise, pointing out that school districts and university programs need to do more to support assistant principal development (Barnett et al., 2017; Cohen & Schechter, 2019a; Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Hunt, 2011; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016). Research suggests there are required dispositions and a level of commitment that must exist before a principal can serve as an effective mentor to an assistant principal (Winemiller, 2019). Liang and Augustine-Shaw's findings led them to assert to better prepare assistant principals to lead schools, school districts should prioritize developing building principal leadership skills as well as provide their principals with explicit training in effective mentoring techniques.

Historically, researchers indicate that budgeting and additional management style tasks should be freely divulged during administrative team meetings, as principals seek ways and make intentional time to build the capacity of their assistant principals (Cohen & Schechter, 2019b; Paskey 1989; Winemiller, 2019). In the past, assistant principals reported that they did not feel prepared to become principals after serving in their present roles due to a lack of a formal mentoring program and/or effective principal leadership (Hausman et al., 2002). Recently, it has been reported that principals who receive adequate training and coaching to be effective mentors to assistant principals can and will be effective in developing their AP's

capacities (Cohen & Schechter, 2019a; Gurley et al., 2015; Hunt, 2011; Ryan, 2011; Winemiller, 2019). Winemiller sought to explore the relationship between effective principal mentoring and assistant principal development. Her case study consisted of a high school principal, his two assistant principals, and the district superintendent ($N=4$). The findings (resulting from five semi-structured interviews) indicated that “through mentoring, principals provide assistant principals with opportunities to gain and refine instructional leadership skills” (Winemiller, 2019, p. 124). She further asserted that “practices implemented by a high school principal are translated to their assistant principals’ experiences as instructional leaders” (Winemiller, 2019, p. 129).

Coaching and Mentoring for Leadership Capacity and Confidence Development

In addition to mentoring, research also indicates that districts that invest in training and coaching programs for assistant principals and aspiring school leaders can have promising results. Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) wrote about the similarities which exist between coaching and mentoring such as the ability to change a person’s belief system, conversations, relationships, and an increase in self-confidence and self-actualization, which all lead to professional transformation. Hayes and Burkett (2021) conducted pre and post semi-formal interviews of 26 assistant principals in an urban school district in Texas who felt prepared to become principals with additional mentoring, coaching, and training support. The scholars contend that all participants reported that their involvement in the district’s *Coaching Academy for Aspiring Principals* was a positive experience where they gained valuable leadership skills. The APs noted improved communication skills, increased confidence, and a better understanding of the role of vision and mission as leadership skills honed during the academy’s training (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Goldbeck’s (2004) earlier study supports and affirms the work of district-led succession and mentoring programs as she posited, “school districts may no longer rely on the

traditional belief that universities will prepare appropriate numbers of school administrators and that new university graduates will be ready to assume the principalship with little development or help from school districts” (p. 194-195).

In a similar study, Rucker (2021) examined the 100 school districts across the Commonwealth of Virginia that choose to annually invest in the improved leadership capacity of aspiring school leaders via a four-time-a-year cohort program. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, in conjunction with the Western Virginia Public Education Consortium (WVPEC), hosts the leadership cohort, Recently Appointed Administrators (RAA) Program, to provide districts with the support needed to prepare assistant and aspiring principals to serve as building leaders via a coaching/mentorship model. Rucker conducted a focus group interview of 16 aspiring school-building leaders to investigate the impact of the RAA program on leader development. All participants from the focus group of leaders from cohorts 2017-2019 felt their leadership skills were enhanced through the training received. Participants also noted they felt more confident and prepared to take on school-building leadership as principals because of attending the program (Rucker, 2021).

In instances where there is no formal, district-led, coaching, or mentoring program, some assistant principals report feeling ill-prepared for the position. A quantitative study in Illinois disclosed that 17 assistant principals, without a formal mentoring program in place, had a limited understanding of the school budget and duties not performed or those duties preferred to be handled by their supervising principals (Hunt, 2011). Participants note that they either had no direct dealings with school finances or “had little direct involvement in budget development outside of prioritizing departmental requests” (p.168). Budgeting and other duties not assigned, such as those involving master schedule development and planning and/or building maintenance

oversight are also essential skills for any aspiring building leader to understand (Winemiller, 2019; see also Hunt, 2011).

Shifting Demographics and the Need for Increased Mentoring

A shift in student population demographics is another reason to improve the skills of assistant principals via a means such as mentoring. It is projected that by the year 2025, students of color will dominate the public school system for the first time in history (NCES, 2022b). This will require that school leaders be trained and proficient in *culturally responsive pedagogy*, which increases education outcomes for all students because of integrating academic learning with socio-political instruction for greater relevance (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Ladson-Billings defines *culturally responsive pedagogy* as having three tenets: (a) academic achievement/student learning, (b)cultural competence, and (c) socio-political/critical consciousness. Ladson-Billing points out that while Black children are 18% of all pre-school enrollees, they are almost 50% of the students who are out-of-school suspended from preschools. There exists a need for increased Black faculty, staff, and school leaders, but also a better understanding of the impact of cultural and socio-political competence and consciousness and the implications for greater student outcomes. Ladson-Billings asserts that iterations that fail to integrate all three tenets of *culturally responsive pedagogy* will not produce the same results. School leaders must become more competent in *culturally responsive pedagogy* and there must be an increase in school leaders of color to fulfill the purposes of the theory (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Booth (2021) affirms Ladson-Billings (2021) in her quantitative research study confirming the need for her Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (CRSL). Booth issued a survey to 44 elementary assistant principals in a suburban K-12 public school district in Central Virginia. With a 59% return rate, 26 surveyors responded to three research

questions designed to capture: 1) the ability to lead in a diverse setting, 2) perceptions of culturally responsive school leadership, and 3) present professional development needs of assistant principals in the position within their school district. Her findings imply that culturally responsive leadership is essential for fulfilling the present demands of an increasingly diverse student population in America's public schools. Assistant principals noted that they required more training and development to close academic gaps, challenge disciplinary practices that are biased, and identify ways to celebrate and promote diversity in their schools (Booth, 2021).

It is projected that an increase in people of color is necessary for this impending shift in the student population (Grissom et al., 2017). According to NCES in 2019, the number of White students enrolling in public schools fell by 7% as the number of minority students or students of color increased by 3%. This shift amounted to what is currently a 5% difference between students of color and White students in public school settings. Some of the shift is attributed to an increased number of White students attending private schools or being homeschooled. The increase of students of color in public schools could require greater representation of school leaders of color in educational leadership positions to speak on the behalf of and connect with those students (Grissom et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Lomotey, 2019). As the world begins to operate more globally (politically, socially, and economically), diversity and cultural differences should also be represented in school leadership in public education (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Mentoring will provide assistant principals of color the confidence and skill set needed to ascend into building leadership and district level positions (Olow, 2021).

Mentoring to Build Black Female AP Capacity and Confidence

Limited studies exist to support the use of mentoring to develop and cultivate Black female assistant principals to become building principals. Although limited research exists on

this subject area (Sun, 2018), the need to find ways to increase their leadership influence and sustain their presence in public schools is necessary (Edwards, 2016; Jang & Alexander, 2022; McClary, 2019; Olow, 2021). Increasing principal capacity, in general, is crucial, as school leaders can positively (yet, indirectly) impact student achievement (Adams et al., 2017; Grissom, et al., 2017). Adams et al. (2017) asserted after conducting a cross-sectional research design of over 3,000 students throughout 70 schools that, "...school leaders work through teachers to shape the mindsets and behaviors of students" (p. 576). Mentoring has been ranked highly as a leadership improvement mechanism due to its transferability throughout various industries (Hausman et al., 2002). Mentorship has the potential to be a meaningful practice to improve both Black female principal and Black female assistant principal capacity.

Currently, Black principals (both male and female) are 11% of the public-school principal population (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). There are no present NCES (2022a) data to show how many of that 11% are Black females or even Black female assistant principals. With limited data documenting the number of Black female principals or assistant principals, it is challenging to know what their impact is on student achievement (NCES, 2022a). What is documented though, is Black assistant principals, who work in high-poverty, challenging schools, are more likely to transition from school to school and/or leave the field entirely citing a general lack of support and/or professional development and investment (Bartanen et al., 2021; McClary, 2019).

McClary (2019) validated this assertion with the feedback from one of the participants in her qualitative study regarding the impact of mentoring on her leadership capacity. Participant "Pat" declares, though her mentorship was informal, that "...without her mentors, she would have not been successful" (McClary, 2019). Pat, a Ph.D. holder, and school principal further added that despite her obstacles as a Black woman in education, success would not have been attainable

without trusted mentors. Another participant, “Cara,” noted that her mentors, a White male, and a White female were integral to her success as a school leader as they provided her with encouragement and confidence in her role as an assistant principal and then as an elementary principal (McClary, 2019).

Several Black female education K-12 leaders, ranging from assistant principals to district superintendents agree with the positive confidence impact of mentoring on the upward trajectory of their careers (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Harris, 2020; McClary, 2019; Randolph, 2015). Improved confidence leads to better work performance as confidence increases (Swain, 2016). This could translate to student achievement as Black female leaders are provided the tools to successfully lead teachers and staff in hard-to-staff schools. Effective mentoring could be the bridge to connect urban, rural, and underserved populations with strong, effective Black female assistant principals. When assistant principals, who directly supervise teachers and work closely with students for disciplinary, attendance, and academic purposes are nurtured through mentoring, student achievement improves (Stewart, 2016). The literature identifies informal mentoring and effective mentorship programs as quintessential leadership provisions for minority school leaders that a district can provide (Allen et al., 1995; McClary, 2019; Robinson, 2014).

Black female assistant principals and upper-level school leaders have cited the leadership obstacles they have to overcome as a double minority in this country (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Harris, 2020; Lomotey, 2019; Olow, 2021). Double minority is a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the intersectionality of being a woman and being Black in America and what stressors exist because of this duality (Crenshaw, 1989). Both men and women of color assistant principals, including Black women specifically, have reported

feeling the weight of racial stressors in conjunction with the other general stressors felt by their peers and counterparts (Allen et al., 1995; Olow, 2021; Randolph, 2015). In her dissertation research paper, Harris (2020) asserted (from the perspective of a Black woman education leader), “once we get past the hurdles of social inequities, lack of acceptance, and harmful stereotypes, we must do the job through demonstration and evidence that proves we have a right to be at the table” (p. 100). Other studies throughout the literature support her findings as it relates to Black female school leaders (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Harris, 2020; Lomotey, 2019; McClary, 2019; Randolph, 2015). Effective and intentional mentoring could be potentially valuable since assistant principals can engage with a principal or former AP who has overcome insurmountable obstacles to securing the position (Carpenter et al., 2017; Edwards, 2016).

The limited number of Black principals in the United States often results in feelings of isolation due to racial differences or the feeling that there is a gap in understanding between Black principals and their peers (Robinson, 2014; Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Olow (2021) emphasized in her study that only 4% of Black principals are females, as compared to 82% of principals who are Black males or White females and White males. Mentoring could help combat minority status woes for Black female school leaders as they are connected to someone heavily invested in their leadership development regardless of race. In 1989, Lomotey wrote that the plethora of data chronicling the perspectives of school leaders existed for White males, with Black females being almost nonexistent in the literature (Lomotey, 2019). More recently, Lomotey further adds that additional scholarly journal articles and quantitative data are still needed to learn more about Black female school leadership (rather than solely through dissertation publications drafted by Black females). Lomotey (2019) offers that without adequate

literature to support mentoring for Black female school leaders, the potential impact of effective mentoring to improve school and learning conditions remains unknown.

Mentoring to Mitigate Barriers for Black Female Assistant Principals

Over the past 30 years, when interviewed, Black women have expressed a myriad of perceived challenges and barriers to entry into higher levels of education leadership (Allen et al., 1995; Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Burton et al., 2020; Edwards, 2016; Harris, 2020; Lomotey, 2019; McClary, 2019; Olow, 2021; Randolph, 2015; Robinson, 2014; Ryan, 2011). Black school leader challenges range from *intersectionality* and gender disparities to racial tensions and *micro* and *macro aggressions* (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Randolph attributes the present resilience and determination of Black female education leaders to an understanding of the hardships endured by predecessors such as Mary McCleod Bethune, Nannie Burroughs, and Fanny Jackson Coppin, all former school leaders. For these women, education was a social justice effort to lift the Black race from poverty, inferiority status, and a lack of political representation (Jang & Alexander, 2022; Randolph, 2015). Their altruism outweighed the challenges they faced because they understood the immensity of the responsibility that they held to educate their race at all costs (Jang & Alexander, 2022).

Another observation about Black female education leadership (and barrier to entry to the principalship) is that some Black women may be experiencing multigenerational trauma as descendants of enslaved Africans (DeGruy, 2017). This trauma impacts self-esteem, and confidence, and could lead to *hyper-vigilance* making the burdens of leadership even more difficult to bear (DeGruy, 2017; Liao et al., 2020). In her seminal work, DeGruy (2017), after six years of mixed-methods research, presents a conceptual framework to explain some of the negative social behaviors of Black Americans. She contends that the unhealed psychological,

physical, and spiritual trauma experienced by those who came to America via the Transatlantic slave trade results in epigenetic outcomes for their present-day descendants (DeGruy, 2017). Naming this theory, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (P.T.S.S.), DeGruy argues that the lack of healing for Black Americans results in higher levels of social anxiety and difficulty in coping strategy development. DeGruy's explanation of the adaptive behaviors of Black Americans could make mentoring an essential element in ensuring that Black female administrators are given the emotional support they need to persist during challenging times as leaders.

School leaders who are in the minority benefit from intentional and well-assigned mentorship relationships (Kruse & Krum, 2016). Data from scholarly research have supported the use of effective mentorships for all women who aspire to serve as leaders and managers (Goldring et al., 2021; Kruse & Krum, 2016; Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021). Meschitti and Smith (2017) conducted a meta-analysis study of over 350 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 1990 and 2017 of academic mentoring for women academics in the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and Switzerland. The researchers concluded that mentoring was effective in helping female academic leaders successfully network and build relationships with those who held positions in which they aspired to serve in the future (Meschitti & Smith, 2017). What was also cited was increased retention and promotion, lowered feelings of isolation, and increased confidence for mentees.

Regarding Black women, an even smaller demographic in education leadership, scholars have also conducted and/or reviewed case studies and research to demonstrate the benefits of mentoring programs for aspiring and practicing K-12 and higher education professionals (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Jang & Alexander, 2022; Jean-Marie, 2013; Jernigan et al., 2020; Lomotey, 2019; McClary, 2019; Olow, 2021). When it comes to school leadership, where

female principals are a minority in the field (Tarbutton, 2019) effective mentorship could mean the difference between a high-performing and low-performing school because of the need for intentional development of a female principal's confidence and leadership skill set (Robinson, 2014; Swain, 2016). Using a criterion sampling, Robinson conducted face to face, one-hour interviews with 10 Black female principals, assistant principals, and district administrators in four suburban districts. After codifying the data, the researcher's findings conclude that the role of mentoring and networking was beneficial for all the participants interviewed (Robinson, 2014).

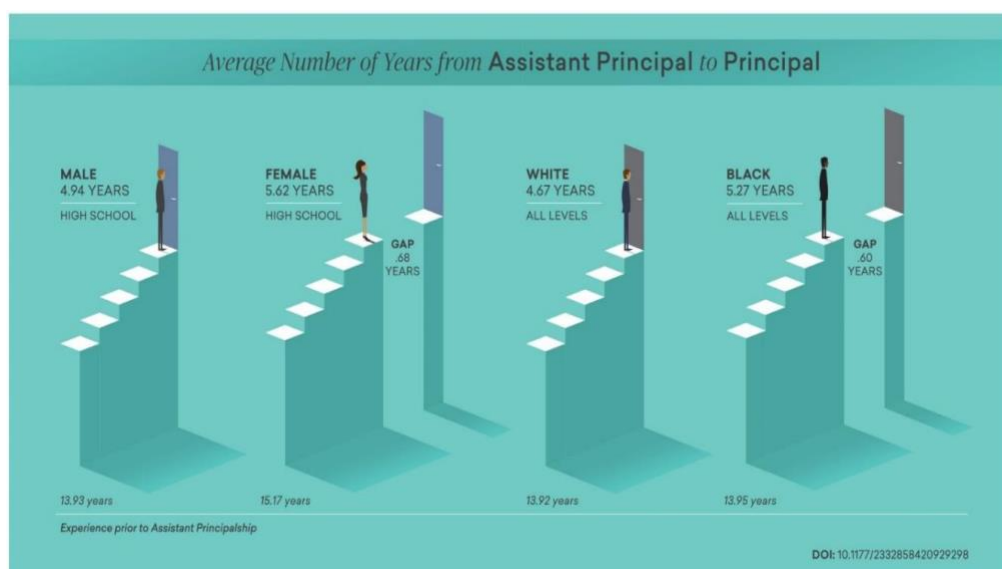
Aligning with the work of Swain (2016) and Robinson (2014), Kruse and Krumm (2016) cited male dominance in education leadership as a potential barrier to entry for all female education leaders. According to their qualitative study of four rural and suburban female principals in Oklahoma, women are competing for positions traditionally held by males of all backgrounds. In their case study, Kruse and Krumm found that male leadership was dominant with 91 out of 388, or 23%, of females leading any of the schools in the state of Oklahoma. The disparity between the ratio of male and female education leaders could account for conflict in leadership styles and/or barriers to entry into higher education leadership positions due to low representation. Mentoring female school leaders could prove to be a way to increase the number of females in upper-level education management positions as principals, district leaders, or higher education leaders. Kruse & Krumm's (2016) implications from their findings led them to conclude that "the barriers that have limited administrative opportunities for women—lack of mentors, lack of networking, and deficits in their knowledge base of school finance and operations—can be corrected" (p. 10).

Black Female Assistant Principals Have Challenges Ascending to Principalship

With Black female leaders being a minority in public education, they could have additional difficulty in obtaining access to principal positions (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Olow, 2021; Randolph, 2015). Figure 2 illustrates the average number of years for males, females, White, and Black assistant principals on their roads to principalship (Bailes & Guthrey, 2020). The depiction asserts that the length of time for a White male or female AP is significantly shorter statistically than for a Black male or female to obtain a high school principal position, including differing years of experience. Additionally, the duration of time for a White AP to obtain any level of principalship is also significantly shorter statistically than for a Black AP even with equal years of experience (Bailes & Guthrey, 2020).

Figure 2

Average Number of Years From Assistant Principal to Principal



Mentoring could even the playing field as Black women education leaders build their leadership capacity and increase their confidence to perform the job. Jernigan et al. (2020) add to the research and support this assertion, concluding after an integrative analysis study of higher

education that mentoring is an effective professional development strategy for Black men and women in leadership. Effective mentoring provides mentees with the confidence needed to take on the challenges of leadership (Olow, 2021). Black women education leaders require additional support and mentoring due to their present status as a minority female population in a traditionally White male-dominated field (Bailes & Guthery, 2020).

The ever-changing role of the assistant principal position requires additional training and support to manage the complexities of the position (Barnett et al., 2017; Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Hayes, 2019; Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Searby et al., 2017; Williams, 2019; Zepeda et al., 2012). As assistant principals are called upon to build teacher capacity in pedagogy and content while managing the negative behaviors of students within the building and attending to the many facets of building and facilities management, mentoring and additional professional development is crucial (Goldring et al., 2021; Hayes, 2019; Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Searby et al., 2017). The multifaceted nature of the position demands that APs be as heavily equipped as possible to impact student outcomes through effective leadership (Grissom et al., 2017; Grissom et al., 2021). Unfortunately, present qualitative studies of assistant principals conclude that many feel ill-equipped to move into principalship positions after having served as assistant principals, even after several years of service (Hayes, 2019; Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Mentoring has the potential to provide support for assistant principals desiring to become more effective as leaders and/or principals.

Future Implications for Increased Mentorship for Black Female Assistant Principals

A more generalized interpretation of the challenges APs, particularly Black female APs face, and whether mentoring could play a role in their success/ascension is crucial. Unfortunately, studies show that some principals express a lack of time and support to prepare

and equip their assistant principals for succession (Louis et al., 2010; Peter-Hawkins, 2018; Zepeda et al., 2012). Districts that elect to design a conceptual framework and/or principal leadership academies to better build the capacity of assistant principals will benefit (Sun, 2018; Williams, 2019; Winemiller, 2019). Additionally, an effective mentoring program, strategy, and framework at the district level designed with principals in mind, could empower principals, making them better equipped or prepared to mentor their assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2017; Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Cohen & Schechter, 2019b; Swain, 2016).

Research validates that though small, Black women are effective school leaders for students of all races and backgrounds, but they need support to remain in position (Carpenter et al., 2017; Edwards, 2016; Lomotey, 2019; McCleary, 2019). The limited research on Black female assistant principals, who are a growing education leadership demographic in the country will benefit from additional research (Olow, 2021). Their perspective and inclusion in the conversation could be beneficial as NCES (2022b) advises the number of students of color continues to increase in the coming years. Researchers must further discuss the perspectives of Black female assistant principals to learn more about their conditions and perspectives as school leaders. More studies dedicated to phenomenological and narrative approaches to research could assist in gaining perspective through the inclusion of significant statements and reflection (Creswell, 2018).

It is imperative that Black female assistant principals be able to share their perceived barriers to entry into principalships from across the country. Currently, Black female assistant principals serve the most underserved and marginalized populations of students, requiring a strong skill set and fortitude (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Jang & Alexander, 2022). Their unique perspectives may ensure that in future years, Black female assistant principals are able to self-

report increased confidence in relationship to new practices and policies implemented at the district and state level (Harris, 2020; Lomotey, 2019; Randolph, 2015). Effective mentors could improve and increase their impact on student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and greater community engagement through improved leadership skills and stronger confidence (Jang & Alexander, 2022).

The perspectives of key stakeholders such as teachers, students, and parents as they relate to assistant principal effectiveness are limited and in most research studies, nonexistent. Additionally, stakeholder perspectives may impact how well or if a school leader is able to improve their leadership skills to have a greater impact on student achievement (Bukoski et al., 2015; Louis, et al., 2010). Combining the unique perspectives of stakeholders with empirical data before, during, and post mentoring could provide greater insight into the effectiveness of mentoring to impact school leadership (Bukoski et al., 2015).

Summary

The primary purpose of Chapter 2 was to examine the relationship between mentoring and improved leadership and confidence for leaders. Its primary objective was to examine the effects that mentoring and/or mentorship programs have specifically on assistant principal confidence, leadership development, and ascension to the principalship. A secondary objective was to determine if research suggests that mentoring could or would be an effective way to improve Black female assistant principal leadership skills and confidence as a path toward ascension to the principalship or other desirable leadership aspirations. The signature emergent theme is limited research exists on the scope of the role, perspectives, and perceived barriers for assistant principals aspiring to principalship for in America's public schools and requires action (Cohen & Schechter, 2019a, 2019b; Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Mentoring plays a pivotal role in the professional development and success of assistant principals (Armstrong, 2015). Mentoring serves as a cornerstone for effective leadership within K-12 schools and education institutions (Armstrong, 2015). As individuals assume the responsibilities of assistant principalship, the guidance and support provided through mentoring relationships become integral to navigating the intricacies of school administration (Adams et al., 2017). By exploring the significance or perception of mentoring, it is possible to help shape the trajectory of assistant principals by enhancing their capacity to meet the diverse challenges inherent in K-12 school leadership (Adams et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

This research study intended to add to existing research regarding how former or current serving Black female assistant principals in a K-12 public school setting perceive their mentoring experiences while serving in the role. The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership capacity development. Through learned experiences, the intent was to identify the perceived benefits of mentoring to improve Black female AP self-confidence and leadership capacity. A secondary purpose was to learn if participants perceived that race had any impact on their ability to serve successfully in the role. This information could add to the literature to determine ways to best support Black female assistant principals who feel unprepared to serve in their roles.

Research Question

Creswell and Poth (2018) assert that qualitative research questions are “open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional” and utilize the inquiry stems “what” or “how” when attempting to investigate phenomena (p. 137).

The singular research question guiding this study was: How do Black female assistant principals perceive the effectiveness of their current or past mentorship experiences on their leadership development and self-confidence to perform in the role as assistant principal? The sub question for the study was: Do Black female assistant principals indicate that their race had any impact on their ability to perform in their roles successfully?

Qualitative Approach to Inquiry/Research Design

Creswell and Poth (2018) asserted that there are five common qualitative approaches (narrative research, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study). A researcher must thoroughly examine all five approaches against their focus of study or topic to be presented. Knowing the differences between the five qualitative approaches to research, in addition to the focus of your research and questions that need to be addressed in the study, is pivotal to accurate selection of the approach that will best produce the desired outcomes of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The topic of the study, therefore, lent itself to a feminist/critical framework with a phenomenological research approach. By detailing how Black female assistant principals have experienced mentoring in their positions, the researcher was able to use perspective as a driver to describe related themes concerning their leadership mentoring experiences and its impact on both their leadership development and confidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This framework and research design selection is due to the need to focus on the commonalities of marginalized study participants who have experienced a phenomenon such as mentoring while serving as Black female assistant principals. By studying their lived experiences, we describe “explanations or analyses” of those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The history of using qualitative approach to inquiry to analyze a problem is also deeply rooted in African ancestry, as qualitative

research permits an examination of the voiceless through storytelling (Clemons, 2019). As a result, qualitative research design is an appropriate method of inquiry for this study, as it helps amplify the voices of a population of education leaders of African descent who are under-researched in current literature (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Jang & Alexander, 2022; Jean-Marie, 2013; Jernigan et al., 2020; Lomotey, 2019; McClary, 2019; Olow, 2021).

The use of phenomenology as a research approach allows a researcher to reveal potential commonalities amongst a specific group of individuals to establish a shared meaning of lived experiences such as mentoring during a particular period of their careers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenon, which is philosophical in nature, is an understanding of how a particular group lives, shares beliefs, and interprets the world around them, which could lead to potential research breakthroughs for problems shared by any one group. Moustakas described phenomenological studies as a description of “what” and “how” a group experiences any human experience such as matriculating through college or growing up in New York City the 1980s (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There is little research devoted to the topic of describing the lived experiences of Black female assistant principals who have been mentored.

A comparison between Black female assistant principals who have been mentored and those who have not been mentored was not made, as the goal of the study was not to generalize or test a theory, but to understand and form a theory through gathering insight (Creswell, 2018). This study was intended to solely learn from Black female leaders, who have served as assistant principals or are currently serving as assistant principals, their perceptions of mentoring on their leadership development and self-confidence. Therefore, this research lent itself to the characteristics of a standard qualitative study, as the researcher listened to gain insight and conceptualized an understanding based on what was heard (Creswell, 2018).

Interpretive Research Framework

Philosophical assumptions often guide the work of a qualitative researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These assumptions impact

- the perspectives and experiences brought to the research by the researcher(s),
- how a researcher's beliefs or axiological assumptions guide the researcher's actions,
- the researcher's selection of theoretical and/or philosophical frameworks,
- methods by which data are collected and analyzed,
- decision-making related to the display, reveal, and use of findings. (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

As a result, the scholar must situate both their philosophical views and interpretive frameworks within the research process to maintain the confidence of the reader (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is referred to as *positionality*. The researcher of this study is a Black female who is a former assistant principal. This positionality is the basis for the interpretative framework, which is a hyphenated framework, blending the orientation of both feminist and critical theoretical frameworks.

Participants

Purposive sampling allows a researcher to selectively choose participants who have experienced mentoring as assistant principals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposive sampling was utilized for this study to target specific persons with similar attributes; therefore, it was the best approach for the study of a marginalized group (Creswell, 2018). Historically, Duke (1984, as cited in Creswell, 2018) advocated for the studying of no more than 3 to 10 participants in one phenomenological study. More recently, Creswell and Poth (2018) state that a phenomenological

study should identify a group of individuals varying in size from “3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15” (p. 76). This study adhered to this prescription keeping the sample size manageable.

All participants self-identified as Black females or biracial females who identify as Black and served between 2013-2023 as assistant principals within the K-12 public-school setting for a minimum of one year. Interview participants varied in their current positions of employment, demographic location, type of student populations they serve (rural, suburban, urban), level of education, years of service/experience in education. Current exclusion criteria, therefore, included any Black female assistant principal who has not served in the assistant principal role for at least one year and any assistant principal who did not identify as a Black female. The rationale to accept participants who have previously served in the role was to gain insight from Black female assistant principals who had ascended to district and/or other leadership positions. It was important to also learn if the perceptions of mentoring served as a catalyst for ascension and/or to the confidence development of former Black female assistant principals. Current serving assistant principals were able to provide insight regarding current needs and perceptions of mentoring on their leadership and confidence development.

A questionnaire consisting of six demographic questions (Appendix A) was issued to all participants post the interviews to collect additional data. The intent of the qualifying questionnaire was to ensure that an equal distribution of participants came from varying school settings and had varying lengths of time being mentored while serving as APs. The researcher also intended to learn the current placement of those participants who were past serving assistant principals. The demographic questionnaire’s estimated completion time for participants was five minutes or less. An Excel spreadsheet was exported from the Google Form to capture

questionnaire data gathered from both personal perspective as well as targeted information of potential interview participants.

- The criteria for participant inclusion and exclusion in the study included the following: Participants: Must be a Black female or identify as such
- May be a district school leader, superintendent, principal, and/or instructional specialist/director/coordinator who had served as an assistant principal between 2013-2023
- May be a current assistant principal who has served in the position for a minimum of one school year
- Must have served in a K-12 school setting anywhere in the United States
- Must have participated in formal (district sanctioned) or informal (self-selected) mentoring experiences with a previous assistant principal while serving as an assistant principal in a K-12 public school system
- Must consent be considered for a one-on-one interview

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to collecting research, approval was obtained from the Virginia Tech University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approval is required to demonstrate that a researcher has gained the knowledge essential to design a research study adherent to ethical guidelines (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher completed Social and Behavioral Research via the CITI Program to be eligible to conduct qualitative research (Appendix B).

This study utilized a sample size of 13 participants. Although several strategies exist for sampling, qualitative research relies heavily on purposeful sampling to expand knowledge of a topic rather than to provide opportunities for generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study

consisted of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews for data collection on Black female assistant principal or former assistant principal perceptions of the challenges of the position and their perceived impact of assistant principal experiences of mentoring on their leadership and confidence development. The interviews were semi-structured to permit the interviewer the option to ask probing questions that were organically designed from the flow of the conversation (Miles et al., 2020).

Once the number of participants was reached and the interview protocol and duration of time for the interview were refined, the recruitment process was a multimodal approach (both passive and active methods) via email (Appendix C) to members of Black Women Education Leaders, Inc. (BWEL) and via a social media flyer (Appendix D) to a wide audience of nationwide prospective participants for a wide sampling (Miles et al., 2020). The researcher issued a personal email (along with the research flyer) to members of a nonprofit organization, of which she is both Founder and immediate past Executive Director. A request for members to share with potential participants was issued in the email to BWEL members to provide an opportunity for potential snowball sampling. The contact information of a total of 73 Black female school, district, and state education leaders nationwide was utilized for the study.

The rationale for outreach specifically to this organization was that the nonprofit, BWEL comprised a variety of Black female school and district leaders across the country. The school and district leaders within this organization offered varying perspectives and insight as they serve rural, suburban, and urban school districts nationwide. One of the fundamental declarations within the mission statement for the organization is that BWEL will invest in research that raises awareness of the needs and perspectives of Black female leaders in education (<https://www.blackwomeneducationleaders.com/>).

A flyer was advertised specifically via Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter/X social media sites. The post accompanying the flyer indicated that the request for participants would remain open to the public for 48 hours after the initial social media campaign began. Limiting the length of time for public response helped to control the number of potential participants for the study and preserve the desired sample size. All participants had 48 hours from the issue date of either the flyer or personalized email to respond to the request to participate in the study.

Upon receipt of the email and selection of each participant, interviewees received electronic access to the approved IRB Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study (Appendix E), so that they could review in full, the scope of the research study and full participant expectations if electing to serve as interviewees. The study inclusion email included an IRB approved Doodle poll link which allowed participants to select the date and time that was most suitable for them to meet for an interview. Approximately 48-hours after the issuance of both the flyer and email requesting participants, an email greeting (Appendix F) that outlined the purpose of the study (Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study sheet) and a request for a date and time to conduct the interview via a Doodle poll was issued to those participants deemed eligible to participate.

Following the qualifying of research participants along with information based on the pilot study, the researcher conducted 45-minute to 1-hour, one-on-one interviews of either current practicing or past assistant principals via Zoom. With participant oral consent, one-on-one interviews was both recorded and transcribed to provide confidentiality and safety to participants regarding their perceptions of their experiences as Black female assistant principals who were mentored. The interviews also yielded data from current assistant principals who believed mentoring had affected their decisions to become building principals or district level

leaders. An interview protocol was used for consistency between interviews. Interviewees were asked if they had anything additional to share at the end of each interview and then were thanked for their time and responses provided.

Design and Validation of Instrumentation

Qualitative research requires gaining access to study participants, ethical considerations for data collection, purposeful sampling, protocols for interviewing, data storage and confidentiality efforts, and strategic analysis and data representation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview protocol was conducted in a pilot test with three past serving Black female assistant principals who hold doctoral degrees. The use of the pilot study was to assess the clarity, “refine data collection plans and develop relevant lines of questions” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 165). The mode of the pilot interview was held via Zoom for convenience. Feedback from the pilot interview team was utilized to modify interview protocol and the outlined duration of the interview time. The pilot study will not be included in the research but did reveal suggestions that needed to be made to improve the instruments. Table 4 displays a design of the interview questions and procedures which adhere to all recommendations for preparing and conducting an interview by Creswell and Poth (2018).

Table 4*Procedures for Conducting Interviews*

Recommendations for conducting interviews	Research study procedures
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determine the open-ended research questions to be answered. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please describe your mentor in terms of the person's gender, race, age, and role in education. 2. Describe whether your relationship with your mentor was formal or informal. 3. How did mentoring help you navigate any challenges in your role as an assistant principal? 4. Were issues of race and gender discussed with your mentor? 5. How often did or do you and your mentor talk or meet? 6. Provide an example of any specific leadership skills improved through your mentoring experience. 7. Please explain why you believe your mentoring experience improved or did not improve your self-confidence as an assistant principal. 8. In your opinion, what specifically could have or did make the mentoring process meaningful for you? 9. Do you believe you are (or if currently an assistant principal, will be) successful because of your mentoring experience or mentoring program? Why do you believe this?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Identify interviewees based on purposeful sampling procedures. 	<p>Qualitative research recommends you “study a unique sample,” or “focus on a timely topic” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study examines the perspectives of Black female assistant principals to learn of their perceived barriers within their roles as well as their outlook on the profession and how race potentially impacts the work they do in schools. This population is under-researched and is presently in current academic conversation as districts seek to promote equity in hiring practices (Ladson-Billings, 2021). The study adheres to the purposeful sampling procedures recommended for conducting qualitative research.</p>

3. Distinguish the type of interview based on mode and interactions.
4. Collect data using adequate recording procedures when conducting one-on-one or focus group interviews.
5. Design and use an interview protocol to guide interactions.

Semi-structured interviews rather than structured interviews are utilized in qualitative research. The open-ended, variability in the questions designed allows rich, detailed conversation to occur (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The semi-structured interview is also selected and meant to capture interview participant's perspective rather than to measure or quantify research data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interviews were held via recorded one-on-one sessions in Zoom. The researcher also took written notes as keywords and phrases noted in the literature review and/or research questions emerge.

Introduction (5 minutes):

Hello, _____, my name is Latrese Younger, and I am so grateful that you accepted the invitation to meet with me today. Please state your name for the record at this time. The nine questions I have provided to you in advance will aid in the development of my research study as I gather perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes about the mentoring experiences of Black female assistant principals. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to identify the perspectives of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership capacity development. Your voice is valued and there are no right or wrong responses to any of the questions that will be asked. Please stop me at any time if you have a clarifying question and/or would like for me to slow my pace in questioning. At this time, I will ask for your oral consent to record this interview, in addition to the already issued written consent to record you via both video and audio functionality in Zoom. You will be emailed a copy of the transcript to review for accuracy. As a reminder, I and the principal researcher described on your consent form will have access to this information shared today. Before we begin, do you have any specific questions regarding the questions provided and/or the research collection and storage process at this time? [The interviewer will answer any questions. If there are none, the interviewer will proceed to question number one.]

Additional notes:

Probing questions/phrases were organically developed during the conversation and used at intervals

- throughout the interview to provide clarity and/or depth of responses for the interviewer (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
6. Refine the interview procedures through pilot testing. A pilot study aided in refining and validating study instrumentation. 45-minute to 1-hour, one-on-one interviews conducted via Zoom in private settings provided comfort for participants. The ease and convenience of a virtual interview permitted the researcher to conduct the interviews within a short time frame (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
 7. Locate a distraction-free place for interviews. All virtual interviews were conducted primarily via Zoom in a distraction-free location. The participants were each advised that the location must maintain confidentiality and be free from external distractions and noise.
 8. Obtain consent from the interviewee to participate. All participants orally indicated their consent to participate and record the interview at the start of the recorded sessions.
 9. As an interviewer, follow good interview procedures. The interviewer adhered to all guidelines outlined in the Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study, interview protocol, and practiced active listening and maintaining courtesy during all interviews.
 10. Decide transcription logistics. All logistics as outlined in the IRB form were adhered to by the interviewer.
-

Interview Protocol

Creswell and Poth (2018) prescribe open-ended questions for qualitative research studies to “explore” (p. 52). An interview protocol that is consistent and investigative permits fluid discussion that will guide the study, rather than closed questions that cause respondents to choose from pre-defined responses i.e., quantitative hypotheses (Creswell, 2018). All interviews were conducted August through September 2023. Interviews began with a standard greeting, followed by the researcher’s request to record the interview. Next, interviewees were asked nine questions, grounded in the research from the literature review, to gather perspective, gain insight, and describe the essence of their experiences as mentees while serving as assistant principals.

Probing questions were included in the interview for expansion of the responses or whenever clarification was needed. Participants were advised, at the start of the interview, that they were able to ask clarifying questions and/or for the interviewer to slow the pace of the questioning. Appendix G outlines the interview protocol questions used with all study participants. Appendix H outlines the alignment of the interview protocol to the literature review and as well as the research question and sub question.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña propose three concurrent flows of activity (Miles et al., 2020). The first flow involves data condensation or the process of data collection before and throughout the qualitative research. A spreadsheet was created to house the name, email addresses, date and time of interview, date for the issuance of the transcript for review, and additional notes in the researcher's Google Drive account. Participants were each assigned a participant number which served as a pseudonym (P1, P2, etc.) to maintain anonymity. The use of pseudonyms and/or alphanumeric codes during the transcription of interview data as well as protected passwords on digital files will protect participants. The participant contact spreadsheet, Zoom video with audio, and related raw field notes and materials will be housed on the researcher's Virginia Tech Google Drive for physical storage for three years. The second flow involves data display. Data display in the past would include laborious extended text (Miles et al., 2018). To avoid oversaturating the reader, written information tables were constructed to display data. The third flow of the stream involves drawing and verifying conclusions. The assistance of a peer coder to independently code for themes and verify the accuracy of the transcribed data was utilized.

According to Miles et al. (2020) coding occurs in two stages called First and Second Cycle coding and includes the use of any of the four foundational approaches to coding: “Descriptive”, “In Vivo”, “Process”, and “Concept Coding” (p. 65). Inductive or *In Vivo* codes were placed in quotation marks to honor the voices of the participants in the study. *A Priori* coding or deductive coding was used to analyze the data since the research questions and conceptual framework had already been established (Miles et al., 2020). *A Priori* coding permitted the researcher to aggregate themes consistent with phrases and keywords consistent with and identified in the literature review. The researcher manually identified emergent themes, similarities, and attributes of each interviewee’s descriptions of their mentoring programs and experiences through first and second coding methods.

To strengthen the quality of the data, the use of the 13 tactics prescribed by Miles et al. (2020) helps instill reader’s trust in the validity of the conclusions drawn from the data: a) checking for representativeness, b) checking for researcher effects, c) triangulating, d) weighing the evidence, e) checking the meaning of outliers, f) using extreme cases, g) following up surprises, h) looking for negative evidences, i) making if-then tests, j) ruling out spurious relations, k) replicating a finding, l) checking out rival explanations, and m) getting feedback from participants. Tables generated post manual coding helped display data analysis, major themes, and findings. The research conceptual framework was modified post findings due to emergent themes and trends produced in the study that warranted the change. A recent doctoral program graduate served as a peer coder and conducted independent coding to help confirm themes (a debriefer). This process provided conformability of response interpretation and checked for any researcher biases i.e., the researcher’s desire to demonstrate the effectiveness of

mentorship to advance the mentoring program offered by her nonprofit organization. The debriefer only provided de-identifiable information.

Confidential and Ethical Treatment of Data

To put selected research participants at ease during questioning, they were advised that their privacy interests and ethical considerations were made by the researcher by ensuring that no identifiable information will be of access to anyone external post the interview. The researcher advised participants that the conversation and information discussed will remain confidential between the participant and researchers. Participants were issued pseudonyms as codes to provide anonymity. The researcher, Latrese Younger, the principal investigator, and Dr. M. David Alexander are currently the only people who have access to the interview participant's name and assigned alphanumeric code for added privacy. Any specific characteristics were altered to fully protect interviewees.

To ensure member checking occurred, interviewees received access to the Zoom transcription as a PDF document via email to review responses for accuracy post the interview. Member checking helps add validity and integrity to the study and improve the credibility of the transcribed data. All data from the study are stored securely on the researcher's private laptop and within the Virginia Tech Google Drive assigned to the researcher. Files are also housed on the researcher's Hard Drive for additional protection from potential loss and/or in case of study personnel changes at Virginia Tech. The interview video/audio and all corresponding data will be destroyed within 3 years of the researcher's successful dissertation defense.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study used purposive sampling techniques and was, therefore, subject to limitations. Only females, who identify as Black were eligible to participate in the interview. The sample

size following the purposive selection was 13 Black female assistant principals or past APs between 2013-2023 who served in K-12 public schools. While the participant location was vast, the participant characteristics produced exclusion criteria since private, parochial, charter, boarding, and virtual schools were exempted from the study, as were women of any other racial background. Study participants must also have been mentored while serving as assistant principals from the start of their tenure in that position. The researcher conducted 45- minute to 1-hour, on-on-one interviews, making time an additional limiter. Responses may not lead to findings easily generalizable to all K-12 public school assistant principals of other ethnic groups and gender identifications.

A potential assumption was that the researcher's employment at the Virginia Department of Education may have made local respondents apprehensive about full transparency in responding to questions posed. As an Office of School Quality specialist and state education employee, Commonwealth participants may have shared only favorable responses. As Founder and Executive Director of the nonprofit organization being solicited for interviews, potential study participants may feel compelled to respond to the request to interview. To combat these limitations, the researcher chose to open the survey to Black female assistant principals across the nation as well as to inform and assure all participants who are members of the nonprofit that participation will not impact their membership with the organization in any way.

Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth review of the methodological design of the proposed research study. A qualitative study with a critical feminist lens will be utilized to ground the study in an interpretive framework. A demographic questionnaire was issued to participants post the interviews to learn more about their school settings and climate, future aspirations post

mentoring, and the length of time each participant had been mentored. The researcher conducted one-on one, semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions to permit free-flowing responses that helped to capture the essence of the experiences of Black female assistant principals. Data analysis as well as ethical and confidential treatment of data was discussed. The chapter concluded with an overview of the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data

This qualitative study aims to add to existing research regarding how former or current serving Black female assistant principals in a K-12 public school setting perceive their formal or informal mentoring experiences while serving in the role. The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership capacity development. The data will add to the literature to determine the best ways to support Black female assistant principals through mentorship.

The research question guiding this study was: How do Black female assistant principals perceive the effectiveness of their current or past mentorship experiences on their leadership development and self-confidence to perform in the role as assistant principal? The sub question for the study was: Do Black female assistant principals indicate that their race had any impact on their ability to perform in their roles successfully?

A pilot study with five Black females who had served as assistant principals and conducted qualitative research for their doctoral studies was conducted in the summer of 2023. The pilot study conclusions led the researcher to amend three of the interview questions and the introductory statement in the Interview Protocol. Following the modification of the Interview Protocol, an email was sent to 72 members of the nonprofit organization, BWEL soliciting potential interviewees for the research study. The email requested that participants reply to the researcher within 48 hours to participate in the study. Concurrently, a flyer was placed on three social media sites: LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter/X to request participants for the study. After 48 hours, the participant count was finalized at 13. The researcher conducted interviews via Zoom with participants throughout the east coast of United States (states bordering the Atlantic Ocean). Interviews were arranged and conducted over a 2-week time span in fall of 2023. Study

participants varied according to the specified criteria (Table 4) to create stratification and permit comparison between and amongst the groups. Participants varied in their current roles in education, length of time spent in the assistant principal role, geographic region, state of residence, and perceived school setting and climate.

Demographics

The anticipated number of study participants was between 10-15 Black female current or past serving assistant principals from various locations across the United States. There were 13 participants who responded to the researcher in the 48-hour time allowance and fit the study criteria. Nine of the 13 interviewees were members of the nonprofit organization BWEL. One participant was recommended by a candidate who had requested to participate but did not fit the qualifications for the study. At the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher issued a Google Form survey to all interviewees requesting their demographic information for the purpose of ensuring that a variety of participants had been represented in the study. All 13 of the study participants completed the request for demographic information.

Table 5 indicates the regional school settings represented and determined by the study participants.

Table 5

Participants' Regional School Settings

Regional school setting	<i>N</i>	%
Rural	3	23%
Suburban	4	31%
Urban	6	46%
Total	13	100%

Note. Percentages may add to $\pm 100\%$ due to rounding.

Table 6 reflects the reported state of residence for the 13 participants.

Table 6*Participants' Current State of Residence*

State	N	%
Florida	1	8%
Maryland	1	8%
Massachusetts	1	8%
New York	1	8%
North Carolina	1	8%
Texas	2	15%
Virginia	6	46%
Total	13	101%

Note. Percentages may add to $\pm 100\%$ due to rounding.

Table 7 displays the current position in education that the study participants serve.

Table 7*Participants' Current Role in Education*

Role	N	%
Assistant principal	6	46%
Principal	4	31%
Central office employee	3	23%
Total	13	100%

Note. Percentages may add to $\pm 100\%$ due to rounding.

Table 8 indicates the length of time each participant served as an assistant principal while being mentored.

Table 8*Participants' Length of Time as an Assistant Principal While Mentored*

Time	N	%
At least 1 year	1	8%
2-5 years	6	46%
Over 5 years	6	46%
Total	13	100%

Note. Percentages may add to $\pm 100\%$ due to rounding.

Table 9 displays the relationship between the reported school settings and perceived school climates.

Table 9

Participants' School Setting and Climate Perception

School setting	Climate perception	N	%
Rural	People felt engaged, respected, and/or safe daily	1	8%
Rural	People felt engaged, respected, and or safe mostly	2	15%
Rural	People felt engaged, respected, and/or safe occasionally or infrequently	0	0%
Suburban	People felt engaged, respected, and/or safe daily	1	8%
Suburban	People felt engaged, respected, and or safe mostly	3	23%
Suburban	People felt engaged, respected, and/or safe occasionally or infrequently	0	0%
Urban	People felt engaged, respected, and/or safe daily	1	8%
Urban	People felt engaged, respected, and or safe mostly	3	23%
Urban	People felt engaged, respected, and/or safe occasionally or infrequently	2	15%
Total		13	100%

Note. Percentages may add to $\pm 100\%$ due to rounding.

All 13 of the study participants were assistant principals between the years 2013-2023. Out of 13 participants, 7 (54%) served as assistant principals at the high school level, 2 (15%) served as assistant principals at the middle school level, and 4 (31%) served at the elementary school level while being mentored.

Analysis of Interview Questions

The researcher scheduled and conducted individual interviews with the study participants. The nine prepared interview questions were open-ended and aligned to the singular research question and sub question. Because the interviews were semi-structured, the interviewer

had both flexibility and autonomy to ask probing questions to elicit stronger responses to the interview questions presented. An Excel spreadsheet was created with an assigned number for each participant including their full name, email address, interview date and time, transcript issue dates for member checking (accuracy checking), and notes jotted down by the researcher. Transcripts of the recordings were automatically populated using the Zoom platform. The researcher recorded the interview in both video and audio format and downloaded and saved all transcripts of each interview. Recordings and transcripts were placed in individual, alphanumeric coded folders on the researcher's hard drive, saved on a flash drive, and placed in both Google Drive and Microsoft One Drive for added security.

Once saved, the transcripts were reviewed and corrected for accuracy. Transcripts were then distributed to the corresponding interview participants to verify accuracy. Participants were asked to review and submit concerns, inquiries, or recommendations with needed corrections within a 2-week period. Only one participant responded within the allotted time with a request for grammatical revisions. Once the 2-week period had passed, responses to the nine interview questions were placed on an Excel spreadsheet by question, with each tab on the spreadsheet representing an interview question. Six predetermined deductive codes from the review of the research were utilized. Seven inductive codes emerged from the interviews. Keywords and phrases throughout the interviews were color coded using a legend created for the combined 13 codes. Once all codes had been established, the researcher solicited the assistance of a peer coder to verify the accuracy of the transcribed data. Table 10 displays the deductive and inductive codes used to analyze the data.

Table 10*Deductive and Inductive Codes Used to Analyze Participant Data*

Deductive codes		Inductive codes	
Code	Description	Code	Description
NAPC	Navigating AP challenges	SRM	Same race mentor
APLC	AP leadership capacity	SGM	Same gender mentor
APSC	AP self-confidence	F/A M	Formal/assigned mentor(s)
MF	Mentoring frequency	I/U M	Informal/unassigned mentor(s)
B/FAPL	Black/female AP leadership	AR/G M	Alternate race/gender mentor
RTIM	Recommendations to improve mentoring	PFD	Personal fortitude and determination
		OME	Overall mentoring effective

Note. AP = Assistant principal

Interview Analysis

The following analysis of the data will be presented by interview question. Each section will consist of a brief description of each data table followed by participant responses for additional interpretation of the data.

Interview Question 1

Please describe your mentor in terms of the person's gender, race, age, and role in education. Table 11 displays the distribution of the mentoring partnership demographics represented by the 13 participants. Most of the participants demonstrated that their mentors were often of a different race; however, they were of the same gender (n=6). Five participants reported having mentors of both the same race and gender (with all participants identifying as female and Black).

Table 11*Participants' Mentoring Race/Gender Demographic Data Distribution*

Occupational role	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13
Same race/ same gender		X	X					X		X		X	X
Same race/ alternate gender	X	X			X	X		X					
Alternate race/ same gender	X			X					X		X	X	
Alternate race/ alternate gender							X	X					

Note. Participants may have had more than one mentor with the same race/gender (indicated with multiple X's in a column for an individual participant).

Seven of the participants (53.8%) explicitly noted that they would have preferred to have a Black female mentor; however, all noted that they received both expert advice and support from either their formal or informally requested mentors regardless of race and/or gender. Relationships and trust emerged as primary indicators for a successful mentoring partnership, not race or gender. Participant 9, who had explicitly stated that she had requested that a Black female serve as her mentor from her school district, noted the following regarding her assigned mentor who was a White female:

[Eventually] I'd built a relationship with her, and she did a great job of building trust. And I didn't hear anything I told her; I didn't hear it back [from other people]. I knew in her role she had to keep certain things private...because she was assistant superintendent of schools. So, I knew there [would be] some level of confidentiality, and we spoke about that on our first mentoring session. And she was really invested in making sure I was comfortable and [I] trusted if there was a situation in which it was something... [that took place was] race related she would listen and not try to say, "Oh yeah, that happened to me [or I experienced a situation similar to what a Black female education leader might

encounter] when it didn't". So, she would listen and say, well, have you tried this [or that] avenue for some things to work no matter what race you are. (P9, 162)

Two participants noted negative outcomes when partnering or attempting to partner with other Black females for mentorship (P5 & P7). Participant 5 shared that she had experienced "crabs in a barrel" scenario, where a Black female who was already positioned in a high-level leadership position refused to support her. Like P5, P7 stated that she was devastated when she had approached a Black female, whom she had respected in the field, to ask if she would mentor her and was told "I don't do that." Eventually, one participant was mentored by a Black male (P5) and the other by a White male (P7).

Table 12 indicates the occupational roles of the study participant's mentors. The occupational roles of the mentors for each of the participants at the time of their mentoring relationship include supervising/non supervising principal (P1, P2, P4, P8, & P10), mentor coach (P1), instructional coach (P1, P12), superintendent (P2, P7, & P13), associate/assistant superintendent (P3, P9), principal supervisor or supervisor of principals (P5), retired principal (P6), chief of schools (P8), seasoned assistant principal (P12), and education consultant (P11). All 13 participants described their mentors as older than they were, ranging between the ages of 45-60 at the time of their mentoring relationship.

Table 12*Participants' Mentor Roles at the Time of Mentoring Distribution*

Occupational role	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13
AP - seasoned												X	
Educational consultant											X		
Chief of schools								X					
Mentor coach	X												
Principal (supervising)	X	X		X				X	X				
Principal supervisor					X								
Principal – retired						X							
Instructional Coach	X											X	
Superintendent		X					X						X
Superintendent – associate/assistant			X						X				

Note. AP = Assistant principal; participants may have had more than one mentor (indicated with multiple Xs in a column for an individual participant).

Interview Question 2

Describe whether your relationship with your mentor was formal or informal. Seven participants were assigned a formal mentor by their respective school district; however, eight out of the 13 (62%) participants indicated that their districts either “did not assign mentors to assistant principals” (P5, /21) or that they chose to request assistance from people whom they knew well, trusted, and respected for mentorship (P4, P5, P7, P8, P10, and P13). This dynamic created the multiple mentors shown in Tables 11, 12, and 13. The mentoring relationship distribution is displayed in Table 13.

Table 13*Participants' Mentoring Relationship Distribution*

Relationship	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13
Formal	X	X	X			X		X	X		X	X	
	X												
Informal	X	X		X	X		X	X		X			X
								X					

Note. Participants may have had more than one formal or informal mentor (indicated with multiple Xs in a column for an individual participant).

Two participants determined they would seek out additional mentors, although their school districts had assigned them mentors (P1 and P2). Participant 1, who had been assigned two mentors by her school district, “adopted” her supervising principal as her primary mentor when one of her assigned mentors left the school district and the other was not as easily accessible to her when she felt she needed support. Participant 1 shared,

There was a struggle for me in terms of the mentoring aspect. So, with my mentor in the building.... She left in November and assumed a different role, and with the county level mentor... I could go to her when I needed assistance, and so I really think that my principal [Black male in mid-40s] kind of picked up the pieces that were kind of dropped from not having a school-level mentor. And so, on the day-to-day, I think he really played a major role in my development more so than anybody else. (I26)

Interview Question 3

How did mentoring help you navigate any challenges in your role as an assistant principal? Participant’s perceived challenges or barriers were placed into five distinct categories: effective communication, school operations/people management, instructional knowledge, race, and gender based on individual responses to interview question three and are displayed in Table 14.

Table 14*Participants' Reported Challenges/Barriers Distribution*

Challenge/Barrier	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13
Effective communication		X	X	X	X		X						X
Instructional knowledge		X		X					X				
School operations/people management	X		X			X		X	X	X	X	X	
Race	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Gender	X	X	X		X		X			X	X		X

Participant 12, who had shared that her assigned mentor was “nonexistent” had to recall how informal mentors and supporters provided her with direction regarding school operations, people management, and race. She highlighted the importance of mentors taking their roles seriously by stating,

...imagine if I was the person who didn't have other people pouring into [choosing to invest time in] me. That could have been like... the end of my admin career. I could have been like this AP thing [being an assistant principal] sucks. Nobody's here to support me. I mean, because being an administrator is hard...that could have...been the end of my career. But I had so many people [mentors] who were like [saying], “no, you got this--keep going. (P12, 197)

Levels of support for mentees were contingent upon the relationship they had with their formally assigned or informal mentors and/or the ability to meet with their mentors for consultation and support. The majority of the participants (7 or 53.4%) felt their work demands as assistant principals were overwhelming. Participant 3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P11 used words like “navigate,” “helped,” and “showed me the way” to describe how their mentors supported

them, while P1 and P10 used terms like “provided assistance” and “responded to questions” to describe their mentoring level of support for addressing the challenges of the assistant principal job.

Interview Question 4

Were issues of race or gender discussed with your mentor? Of the 13 participants, 10 (76.9%) stated that their mentors, who were either of the same or different race, helped them navigate issues regarding race (Table 11). Nine out of 13 (69.2%) participants shared that their mentors of the same gender or alternate gender helped them cope with challenges of being a female assistant principal. Seven out of 13 (53.8%) shared that they faced issues of being both Black and female in their roles as assistant principals (P1, P2, P5, P7, P8, P10, and P11).

Participant 4 recalled,

“I think there was one incident where I supervised the reading department and one of the teachers wasn't so receptive to some of the suggestions that I was making in terms of lesson delivery and curriculum delivery...and personally, I felt that it was because of my race that she was not receptive to what I had to say” (I26).

Both P2 and P5 recalled experiences where other Black females within their respective buildings, or peers in educational leadership, treated them with contempt. Participant 2 and P5 described how their mentors gave them the wisdom to navigate those challenges with grace. Participant 5 emphatically stated, “It was the discussions that we had were about how sometimes Black women and leadership like to tear each other down...and so we talked about that a few times” (I23). When P2 met with one of her mentors (a Black female superintendent) for lunch one day, she remembers being told as she contemplated a response to a conflict, “not every Black woman--not everybody who looks like you and me will support you” (I100).

Interview Question 5

How often did or do you and your mentor talk or meet? Categories for mentor frequency ranged from daily to minimal to no contact at all for some participants. Table 15 displays the distribution of the mentoring frequency collected from the data.

Table 15

Participants' Mentoring Frequency Distribution

Frequency	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13
Daily	X			X									X
Weekly		X	X				X						
Biweekly					X						X		
Monthly	X	X				X		X	X				
Minimal to no contact or as needed									X		X		X

Note. Participants may have had more than one formal or informal mentor (indicated with multiple Xs in a column for an individual participant).

The majority of the participants shared that although their mentors had been assigned. There was a general lack of structure for the mentoring process for them as assistant principals. Participant 1 discussed the challenges of being a mentee while serving as an assistant principal, identifying distance from her mentors and overwhelmed by school discipline as primary obstacles. She recalled, “Discipline takes over everything...it was hard to get on the same page with her [the district assigned mentor]. We didn’t speak as much as I probably needed” (P1, 146). Participant 10 talked about the mentoring frequency occurring on an as-needed basis. She shared, “It was some reactive meetings based upon the things that would go on in the building” (P10, 167). Participant 7 echoed P10’s response stating, “We talked several times a week... [impromptu] just due to the job” (125). Participant 8 advised that her check-in meetings were

“just as needed. It wasn't like a set thing” (188). Participant 9 stated that COVID influenced her mentoring meeting frequency by sharing,

So, we were structured to meet once a month. However, we talked about every 2 weeks, especially as I first got started, because I got started in an assistant principal role when COVID first hit. So, I was talking to her at some point weekly, just because I just didn't know how to navigate it [the assistant principal position] when my district was in school full-time. So, I just had a lot of questions about navigating that and encouraging teachers who were fearful just because of the pandemic. So, we would talk weekly about the first three months ... just cause I had so many questions. But then after that, it was monthly. (145-50)

Participants with daily meetings shared that their mentors had established close relationships with them, so they felt comfortable checking in each day. Participant 1 lauded her principal, whom she had adopted as an informal mentor as helpful because “of the representation aspect” [her principal/informal mentor was a Black male] (152). Participant 4 said that she and her mentor “...touched base every day...whether it was just a touch in to say how things are going, she had a true open-door policy” (146). Participant 13 fondly shared that she and her informal mentor “speak definitely almost every day whether it’s on the phone or quick text” (132).

Interview Question 6

Provide an example of any specific leadership skills improved through your mentoring experience. Leadership skills developed through mentoring stemmed from the perceived challenges that mentors had helped the mentees overcome (Table 13). As mentor relationships developed, participants shared specifics of how their mentors improved their ability

to effectively serve in the role of the assistant principal. Participant 2 specifically mentioned that her mentor taught her how to be courageous about things she did not know so that she could stretch and grow. He also taught her how to become a masterful listener. She described that in her mentoring relationship she was “encouraged” and “stretched” as she stated that he told her “‘you’re going to have to listen’...they [the teachers whom she was supervising] don’t often want feedback. They just want you to listen” (P2, 1127). Similarly, other participants shared how much their formal and informal mentors emphasized the importance and significance of building and maintaining solid relationships with the staff they supervised.

Participant 3 states that working with her mentor, her “educational relationship-building skills have definitely improved” (157). She spoke about learning to finesse how to approach or respectfully confront teachers as being a primary determinant of a teacher’s willingness to be receptive to feedback as she shared, “it’s the way you talk to the individuals” (160) that matters most. Participant 1 repeated this sentiment as she shared that her mentor helped her with planning her approach by teaching her “the skill of having difficult conversations with people” (164). Participant 5 emphasized that her leadership was strengthened as her mentor helped her to “build relationships with staff, community, and families” (143). Participant 8 and P11 stated that their mentors helped them to identify and best utilize the strengths of their faculty and staff for effectiveness. Participant 8 said her mentor taught her to value “people’s strengths” and to teach her staff to “dream big” [through risk taking] so that they can improve learning outcomes for students (199-100). Participant 11 was advised to “get to know the individual teacher’s strengths on the team” (1117) to assist her in helping all teachers regardless of the content they taught to take stock in student achievement. She recalled learning her art team’s curriculum well enough to be able to show them ways in which they could incorporate core subjects into their daily

lesson plans. Participant 12, whose mentor was not helpful because of the lack of a relationship and an unwillingness to meet, stated that one leadership skill she gained was how to have a “safe place for somebody else” and how to “pour back into others” [invest in or show genuine interest in]. She emphasized that she “definitely learned...how to not treat someone” (195) due to her poor mentoring experience. As a current mentor to a new female school leader, she has been “very intentional about trying to make her feel comfortable and make her feel accepted in a way that I was not when I first started” (187).

Interview Question 7

Please explain why you believe your mentoring experience improved or did not improve your self-confidence as an assistant principal. Table 16 displays the distribution of participant’s perceptions of mentoring on their leadership skill development and self-confidence. All participants felt that either their formally assigned or self-selected informal mentors helped improve both their self-confidence and leadership skills through their mentoring experiences while they served as assistant principals.

Table 16*Participants' Perceived Mentoring Impact on Leadership Skills and Self-Confidence Distribution*

Participant	Current role in education	Mentoring improved self-confidence	Mentoring improved leadership skills
P1	AP	Yes	Yes
P2	Central office employee	Yes	Yes
P3	AP	Yes	Yes
P4	AP	Yes	Yes
P5	Principal	Yes	Yes
P6	AP	Yes	Yes
P7	Central office employee	Yes	Yes
P8	Principal	Yes	Yes
P9	AP	Yes	Yes
P10	Central office employee	Yes	Yes
P11	Principal	Yes	Yes
P12	Principal	Yes	Yes
P13	AP	Yes	Yes

All 13 of the interviewed participants attested that their formal or informal mentoring processes did improve their self-confidence. Participant 1 mentioned that her informal mentor, her principal, improved her self-confidence through his mentoring by constantly telling her that she was equipped with all the tools she needed to do the job well so that she “would not get deterred” (I79). Similarly, P7 stated that her White male mentor, “highlighted in me or for me, that I do have what it takes. I do have the skill set necessary and the capacity necessary to do the job” (I63). Participant 9’s White female mentor would affirm her decision-making related to school safety, instructional support, and disciplinary issues she would encounter. On multiple occasions, P9’s mentor assured her by saying “you do know what you're doing” (I62). Participant

3 and P4 described how their mentors would assign them specific leadership tasks and new experiences to gradually build their confidence as they learned the steps needed to overcome them. P3 stated,

She made sure to provide experience in a multitude of areas, which makes me feel that I'm well-rounded and equipped to handle all that comes with being an assistant principal. So, she always reminds me, my goal is not to train you or help you become an assistant principal, but I want to see you expound and become a principal. (I81)

Participant 4 shared,

“I would say my mentoring experience with her actually gave me [leadership] opportunities to grow because she would provide me with projects, things to work on...just working with her gave me the confidence to do what I needed to do” (I62)

Participant 6 and P8 recalled their mentors developing their self-confidence in their roles as assistant principals by teaching them to be “authentic” (P6) and to “just be yourself” as they led their school teams and communicated with families, stakeholders, and students. Participant 11 shared that one of her earlier mentors in her career “was probably the most damaging on my self-confidence” (I152). She stated that her mentor would share damaging information about her to her school principal, which caused them to have a poor mentoring relationship due to a lack of trust and confidentiality.

Participant 12 remembered that although her assigned mentor was nonexistent and unsupportive, her unofficial mentors upheld her by telling her “D____, you got this” and “you got great skills trust your voice trust your instinct--you know, trust your knowledge... of course, be self-aware...make sure that you're constantly learning and growing” (I100). She argued that it is imperative for a Black female assistant principal to believe in herself and motivate herself

when no one else can or will. Participant 10 affirms this by sharing that although her mentor left her position shortly after she was hired [thereby leaving her without a mentor] she motivated herself. She emphatically stated, “my experience as assistant principal [all that she had to learn and do on her own], period, helped build my self-confidence” (P10, 1110). Participant 2 and P13 mentioned that their mentors helped improve their self-confidence through validation and reminding them of how strong they needed to be to serve in the position as assistant principals. Participant 2’s mentor had her begin journaling and developing her self-confidence through reflection to validate her responses to how she handled situations. Participant 13’s mentor always told her, even on her roughest days, that she was “doing a good job” and that she will “make a great leader [someday]” (163).

Interview Question 8

In your opinion, what specifically could have or did make the mentoring process meaningful for you? Four categories emerged from the responses to question eight. Table 17 displays the distribution of relayed recommendations from participants to improve mentoring relationship success.

Table 17

Participants’ Recommendations to Improve Mentoring Relationship Success Distribution

Recommendation	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13
Meeting frequency/ consistency	X					X	X			X		X	X
Commitment/ intentionality				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Same gender and/or race	X		X						X	X			X
Personal perseverance/ fortitude	X	X				X						X	

All 13 participants shared that the four emergent categories (see Table 19) either made their mentoring experience and process meaningful, not meaningful, or what could have been improved to make their mentoring experiences more meaningful to them. Out of the 13 participants, 10 (76.9%) held *commitment and/or intentionality* in high esteem and of more importance than having a mentor of the same gender and/or race when it came to participant's mentoring processes being perceived as meaningful. *Consistency and/or meeting frequency* ranked second to *commitment/intentionality* with a 46.1% rate ($n=6$). Having a mentor of the *same race or gender* ranked third at 38.4% ($n=5$) and *personal perseverance or fortitude* was ranked last at a 30.7% percentage rate according to the responses ($n=4$). Positive attributes of mentoring included the "space to share my concerns and how I was feeling" (P2, 1173) or that the mentor having an "open door policy" and providing the "ability to debrief" was essential (P1, 187). Many participants became visibly emotional as they reflected on their experiences as they responded to Interview Question 8.

Participant 3 shared that having a preexisting relationship with her mentor prior to starting her mentorship helped her," become the person that I am today.... just [from] learning from her" (1102). She concluded in her response to Interview Question 8 with gratitude as she sighed, "I'm grateful" (1104). Participant 4 fondly recalled, "she [her mentor] was a person that just took the time to make sure that not only me, but I think all of the other administrators that were at the school were successful," (185) and that her mentor "held all of us to a high standard" (185). Participant 8 stated that her White male mentor was her biggest cheerleader. She shared that she was "not going to cry" (1132) as she reflected on her mentor taking the time to send her an email once she had become a principal of her own school. In the email, he had reminded her of how proud he was of her and how excited he was to see her excel in the role. Participant 13

disclosed that having another Black female leader from her place of birth [Brooklyn, NY] to “share things,” “celebrate,” and “show interest in her personally” was invaluable to her (181, 84, 85).

Participant 6, P9, P10, and P11 provided the lengthiest responses to Interview Question 8 based on their mentoring experiences not being as meaningful as they could have been.

Participant 1, P9, P10, and P11 also discussed how important it is for Black female assistant principals to have personal fortitude and perseverance while serving in, what they believe, is a high-stress role. Beyond fortitude, P11 wanted readers to know that she worked diligently to develop her own skills and to absorb all she could from her assigned mentor, but sometimes those things were not enough. P11 emphasized,

The mentors are often setting the agenda. They are often the ones who are deciding what it is that I need. But I feel like if we have more authentic conversations around what is it that you feel like you need to work on or what is it that you feel like you need. They [mentors] would ask what I felt like I was struggling with--oftentimes not necessarily, what I felt I was having success with. So that was sort of, you know, assets versus deficit-based approach, right? And so, it...always felt like I was supposed to have a problem [to work through with my mentor]. Not that I wasn't [having a problem] ... It's just like, can we start up here [focusing on my strengths] and then, like come down a little bit [to focus on my areas of growth], you know. I think a little bit more intentionality around where we're going and that I'm [the mentor is] pouring into you so that there's room for you to go to the next level, and that is a very clear and present refrain throughout the experience. (186-200).

Participant 6 echoed the sentiment as she outlined the stressors of the assistant principal position and how crucial it is for mentors to be consistent in their approach to and intentional in the work they do with mentees. She stated,

I feel like what could have made it even more meaningful is consistency. So, if we think about it, currently our school is in [what] 10 months and so being able to have him [her mentor] five times...While those 5 times were impactful and helpful and encouraging... there were other times where I felt like, "Where is my help?" And so, I feel like districts should be cognizant of the mentorship they supply to their leaders, understanding that at any given moment, like for my case in the first 90 days I was thrust from an assistant principal to a principal [position] while my principal had to take a family leave. And so, who prepares and equips the assistant principal? In the past, I know they love to say, sure, you're an instructional leader, but at a campus with over 1,000 students as an assistant principal handling all the discipline, all of the duties handling, all safety concerns....and having to appraise my teachers that are assigned to my load, plus I had to do the principal's load because she's no longer there. Like, who is there to even... who teaches me how to do payroll? It's 90 days in. So, I think we just have to get a little more strategic on how we are equipping assistant principals, especially if the idea is eventually, we want them to go up...well if eventually you want them to go up, there are some things that they need to know that they don't know. Like, how do they approve a shopping cart or how do they handle the school credit card? Like these things, while the principal gatekeeps them, there are things that assistant principals need if they are going to be effective in their transition higher. And I think that should be the purpose. Like, I hope that you [district leaders] don't expect... assistant principals, to remain in that role forever. True enough,

Participant 6, although currently a school principal, does not believe that her mentoring experience impacted her desire to pursue the principal position. She highlighted,

I believe that if we had a targeted--more systematic approach to mentoring, I could be even better. There is a proverb that says, If you want to go fast you go by yourself, but if you want to go far, you need somebody along the way to help you to get there. And so, I feel like that's one of the areas that definitely needs improvement; and not just in my district [but] across the board... like, there needs to be someone who's passionate about mentoring--who cares about people advancing... especially in leadership. I know it's a huge emphasis that most districts have a development department for teachers. But what does the development department look like for leaders, besides these one-off cohort things that they [district leaders] come up with? What are/ how are you intentionally pouring into someone [an assistant principal] after year one? So, after year one, I'm an assistant principal. So now what? How...do you coach me from year one to two? What is the plan from year two to three? What could I be learning? Is there a book study? Of course, as a learner myself, and a leader is a learner-- I'm gonna be looking at outside resources to help develop myself; but what are you [the district] providing for me? What are you pointing me to, so that I could ultimately...help the school system improve? (P6, 183-92)

Participant 7, a current central office employee, shared how her mentoring experience surfaced a desire and mission to help serve other female school leaders. She stated about her White male mentor that, "It also though, gave me the desire to be more present [mentally, physically, and emotionally] in my work with prospective female leaders because...there was a gap there and so there were some voids that he [my mentor] could not [fill]" (P7, 1101). Another

central office employee, P10, really attributed her experience as an assistant principal to be more influential than the time she spent with her district assigned mentor. She recollected,

I did walk away with some great lessons. Some were self-taught, some were revealed to me through situations, but overall and from the people that I worked with, I feel like I walked away with more information. So, the experience [assistant principalship] is what really grew me... (I114).

Participant 2's response is an extension of P10's self-determination, as she attributes her success to being actively involved in her own learning and development. She stated, "I am successful today because of the dedicated mentoring that I had, but also because I participated in being a mentor. It wasn't just one-sided" (P2, I242). Participant 11 and P13 believe that their success stemmed from being mentored by strong, Black female education leaders, with whom they felt both safe and connected.

Summary

This chapter provided the data analysis for the qualitative research study. Individual interviews were conducted and recorded in both audio and video format through the Zoom platform with 13 study participants. A post-interview survey consisting of six demographic questions was issued for data collection and additional analysis. The researcher color-coded responses for important key words, categories, and themes maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Analysis of the data revealed that participants indicated intentionality and consistency in meeting was valued more than having a mentor of the same race and/or gender. Participants also indicated that multiple mentors were sometimes needed to fulfill different purposes as they navigated their roles as assistant principals. Chapter 5 will discuss the

themes and major findings developed from the research as well as provide implications for practitioners, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations for Future Studies

The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership capacity development. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of emergent themes from the study, findings from the study, implications for practice and policy, recommendations for future studies, and a chapter summary. This chapter will conclude with the researcher's reflections.

This qualitative research study focused on both perceptions and experiences of Black female assistant principals via one-on-one interviews. The researcher issued a social media flyer request that yielded responses from potential interviewees located across seven states bordering the Atlantic Ocean. Using the search criteria, 13 Black females, who were mentored and had served as assistant principals or are currently serving as assistant principals, were deemed eligible for participation in the study. Participants were interviewed in a one-on-one, virtual setting using open-ended interview questions that had been piloted with an expert panel group for refinement. One central research question and a sub question guided the interview questions that were designed for this study.

Research Question

The singular research question guiding this study was: How do Black female assistant principals perceive the effectiveness of their current or past mentorship experiences on their leadership development and self-confidence to perform in the role as assistant principal? The sub question for the study was: Do Black female assistant principals indicate that their race had any impact on their ability to perform in their roles successfully?

Discussion of Major Themes

Throughout the interviews, several contributing factors to participant's perceptions of mentoring on their leadership capacity and self-confidence emerged. Those contributing factors enabled the researcher to synthesize the noted patterns from the participant's responses. Patterns were then used to generate a list of emergent themes. Table 17 indicates the four emergent themes from the study accompanied by selected quotes to help illustrate the phenomenon. Three of the four (*Challenges/Barriers of the AP Position for Black Females*, *Relationship and Trust*, *Mentoring Effectiveness*) major themes were consistent with the literature review conducted in Chapter 2. The final emergent theme was divergent, as there was no indication of *Multiple Mentors to Fill Gaps* throughout the literature review, as was noted throughout this present study. Study participants indicated that when they were unable to connect with their mentors through either race and/or gender, they sought out additional mentors to "fill gaps" (P1, P2, P5, P10, & P12). Two participants added that they sought out additional mentors when they felt unfulfilled by the level of commitment and/or quality of the mentoring relationship they had been provided (P5 & P12).

Table 19*Participant Quotes from Emergent Themes*

Theme	Selected Quotes
Challenges/barriers of the AP position for Black females	<p>...the staff population didn't necessarily represent or mirror our student population. And so, myself and my principal coming in was...I don't wanna say a culture shock, but different. And so initially I did get.... comments or people hesitant about what I would bring to the table as a young or youngish-appearing, Black female. (P1, 139-42)</p> <p>But some of the challenges came because women teachers were not willing to give an opportunity to me to help them grow as teachers. And so, when I walked into the building to be introduced, I felt that it was going to be some tension because they were used to having all males as the administrators. Even the athletic director... the lead custodian [responded in that way] I was amazed. (P2, 156-58)</p> <p>Racist things happen when you're the minority leader. (P10, 134)</p> <p>I do kind of remember having a conversation with her about the team one of the one of the two teams that I was leading at that time and there were a couple of White male teachers that were disrespectful. I hate to use the word insubordinate because it seems like so like high-level, but just like, you know, you know, you're the leader, you're expecting something to be done and they, you know, [were] just kind of dismissive... (P11, 154-58)</p>
Relationship and trust	<p>She was very supportive...her mentorship helped me. (P3, 123)</p> <p>...talking to my mentor really helped me to understand that it's not [how I was being treated] a reflection of me. [He helped] me navigate through situations that I was dealing with at work... (P5, 130-31)</p> <p>I [specifically] asked for a female mentor...the type of mentor that I wanted was of course a Black female, but that was not an option....[however] she [my mentor] knew...some experiences that I may encounter, and she had been a principal and an assistant principal in the same district. There were gonna be some institutional similarities. (P9, 120-25)</p> <p>I was able to bring, you know, situations and challenges, at that time that was my first assistant principal role, and it was my first leadership role in a public school district. (P11, 130=31)</p> <p>So, it has been very critical to have a talking partner, and somebody that I can just really be like, this is what I want to do. This is how I'm feeling and to not feel judged and to get solid advice that I have you directly and to see positive results. (P13, 127-29)</p>

Mentoring
effectiveness

My educational relationship-building skills have definitely improved since working with my mentor. She pressed upon the importance of building relationships with the people who play a major role...And maintaining the safety, security, and efficiency of the building [has improved]. (P3, 157)

I think she laid that foundation with the processes and the systems that she put in place, because right now, I'm a very systems person, and I think I'm like that because she was like that. I have to have systems in place." (P4, 193)

I believe that that mentoring experience has contributed greatly to my success. (P7, 175)

So, it [mentoring] did build my self-confidence to a point where I didn't have to connect with her so much because I was confident in my decisions. (P9, 168)

I definitely think my unassigned mentors were very complimentary and very much like, 'D ____, you got this.' You got to believe in yourself cause I really didn't think I should be a leader and so it really took them seeing things in me that I didn't see in myself. (P12, 197-98)

Multiple mentors
fill gaps

I really think that my principal (Black male in mid-40s) kind of picked up the pieces that were kind of dropped from not having a school-level mentor... My district-level mentor didn't really know how she could support me. (P1, 120)

A Black female [who]...also served as an unofficial mentor to me as well. (P2, 120)

Informal. We don't have mentors assigned through the... at the division. We were not assigned mentors, so I had to find one on my own. (P5, 121-22)

I think I got a lot of mentorships...from various people that worked at the school. That included the school security officer which happens to be a White male. But he was very supportive and understanding, unlike a lot of folks that I encountered. But then, the school resource officer was a Black male. He was very supportive as well...both of them were very good and kind of coaching me through situations like [student] searches and stuff like that. (P10, 178-81)

The assigned mentor relationship was pretty much non-existent. With Miss. C __ because she was another Black female, I felt very comfortable talking to her about things when they came up and I don't think they came up a whole bunch but there were a couple of times where, you know, I just had concerns about things. (P12, 152-54)

Findings

Seven findings emerged from the themes presented. All findings are based on the responses to the nine interview questions that were guided by the study's central research question and sub question. A connection between the literature review and present findings will be presented within each discussion of the findings. The singular research question was: How do Black female assistant principals perceive the effectiveness of their current or past mentorship experiences on their leadership development and self-confidence to perform in the role of assistant principal? The sub question was: Do Black female assistant principals indicate that their race had any impact on their ability to perform in their roles successfully?

Finding 1

Relationships, commitment, and trust mattered more than having mentors of the same race/gender to the study participants. All participants, regardless of whether their mentoring partnerships were compatible in gender and/or race, concluded that their mentoring programs or processes were successful (see Table 16). When asked what made or could have made their mentoring processes more meaningful to them, 10 out of 13 (76.9%) participants remarked that mentor *commitment and intentionality* mattered most. Second to these factors were *consistency and meeting frequency* (46.1%; $n=6$). Both factor pairing percentages equated to more than that of the pairing *gender and/race*, which was noted by 5 out of 13 (38.5%; $n=5$), making the *gender/race* pairing factor the least significant of the top three mentoring meaningfulness contributors. The 13 participants identified as Black females, and the findings indicate that Black females' perceptions of commitment and intentionality in their mentoring relationships were contingent upon their assigned or informal mentor's ability to connect with them on personal level as well as to relate to the things that mattered most to them. This suggests

that gender and/or race affinity was not the primary contributor to successful mentorships, nor was it deemed as an essential prerequisite to perceived mentoring meaningfulness.

This finding is consistent with the academic research regarding positive relationships being integral for mentoring partnerships. Leitner et al. (2018) found in their testing of the validity of interracial mentorships that rapport and rapport building are essential to the mentoring relationship. Interracial mentorship permits employers to partner mentors and mentees without the barriers of race affinity as a prerequisite to a successful mentorship. The researchers indicated that interracial mentorships can be successful when both rapport and cultural understanding are established between the mentee and mentor (Leitner et al., 2018).

When a collaborative thread exists between mentors and mentees and self-disclosure or trust-building is prioritized, the mentoring relationship becomes more of a partnership than a hierarchy (Hu et al., 2022). Mentoring as a partnership exchange works best for alternate mentoring gender and/or race pairings (Hu et al., 2022; Leitner et al., 2018; Robnett et al., 2018). Mullen and Klimaitis (2019) refer to this cross-gender/cross-race phenomenon as *alternative mentoring* or *diverse-mentoring* that extends mentoring across races and genders and permits a mentoring relationship to be beneficial for both the mentor and mentee, solely based on the relationship quality of the mentorship.

Finding 2

Participants sought out multiple or informal mentors when they believed they had gaps in leadership skills and/or lacked self-confidence to perform in their roles. Ten of the 13 (76.9%) participants all sought out informal mentors to help them develop and hone their leadership skills and/or to improve their levels of self-confidence as assistant principals (P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P10, P12, & P13). Of the nine who sought out their own mentors while they were

serving in the role, 66.7% ($n=6$) indicated that they had done so because “mentors were not assigned” (P5, /21)) for assistant principals in their school districts (P4, P5, P7, P8, P10, & P13). Participant 1 and P2, who had both been formally assigned mentors by their districts indicated that they wanted additional support for key reasons. Participant 1 sought out an additional or informal mentor to help her grapple with racial tensions she’d experienced while serving in the position. Participant 2 sought out an additional mentor who was of the same gender to help her navigate the stressors associated with female school leadership.

Participant 12 reported that her assigned mentor never made efforts to meet with her beyond the once-a-month quota assigned by the district; this led her to seek out additional mentors to help her navigate the stressors of the role and to help her develop her school leadership skills. Participant 7 recalled that although her superintendent (White male) committed to serve as an informal mentor to her during her tenure as a novice assistant principal; she resolved that she now serves as a mentor to other Black females because there were voids that her mentor could not fill as a White male (i.e., how to address racial or gender stressors associated with being a Black female school leader).

While obtaining additional mentors due to perceived gaps in mentoring capacity is not explicitly addressed in the literature, the desire to gain more skills in assistant principal leadership and/or to strengthen self-confidence levels is noted (Cohen & Schechter, 2019b; Paskey 1989; Olow, 2021; Winemiller, 2019). Studies have shown that assistant principals, although they complete principal preparation programs, perceive that they lack imperative school leadership skills once they are assigned in the role (Cohen & Schechter, 2019b; Winemiller, 2019). Winemiller’s (2019) study asserted that effective mentoring could build and strengthen essential school leadership skills in areas such as budgeting, building maintenance, and master

schedule creation. Olow (2021) concluded from her study that effective mentoring provided Black female mentees with the self-confidence needed to perform successfully in their roles as assistant principals.

Finding 3

Participants indicated commitment/intentionality and meeting frequency/consistency were the top two factors for successful formal and informal mentorships. The words intentional or intentionality are mentioned throughout the transcripts by five participants in relation to how participants either perceived the effectiveness of their mentoring relationships or how their mentoring processes could have been improved (P2, P6, P8, P11, & P12). Participants noted that their mentors who cared about their growth and development demonstrated intentionality and made them feel valued and appreciated as mentees (P2, P4, P6, P12, & P13). Participants defined intentionality in their mentoring processes by indicating that their districts provided “one of the best placements [for mentoring] I’ve seen” (P1, /101)), or that their mentors “poured into” or “shaped” them (P2, /183). Participant 7, P9, and P10 cited that more intentionality regarding the process of assigning mentors to assistant principals should be improved at the district level to include attention to better support and development for assigned mentors, clear and specific objectives and outcomes for mentoring, and a well-intentioned mentor partnering process.

Eight of the 13 (61.5%) participants shared that their meeting frequency was “minimal,” “as needed,” or “nonexistent” and indicated that their mentoring could have been more meaningful with increased meeting frequency (P1, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, & P12). Participant 12 indicated that when her assigned mentor was absent or uninterested in pursuing a consistent and intentional mentoring partnership other than to “check off a box” (/72) she turned to her

former mentors who served her in past roles as a teacher and instructional coach to provide her with the nurture she needed to be successful as an assistant principal.

A high level of commitment and intentionality are noted in the literature as being key determinants of successful mentoring relationships (Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Winemiller, 2019). For Black females, research suggests that intentional partnering and mentors who can meet consistently are especially beneficial for the development of strong assistant principals in the field (Jean-Marie, 2013; Kruse & Krum, 2016; Moore, 2013; Peters-Hawkins at al., 2018). Additionally, scholars have indicated that intentional and improved mentorships lead to better succession plans for school districts, as assistant principals are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to become effective school principals (Jean-Marie, 2013; Moore, 2013; Peters-Hawkins at al., 2018).

Finding 4

Participants indicated that they perceived their race played a role in their experiences as Black female assistant principals. With a percentage rate of 76.9%, 10 out of 13 participants indicated that they perceived their race did have an impact on how others perceived their leadership abilities. Only three of the 13 (23.1%) study participants shared that their mentors did not help them navigate issues of race related to their roles as assistant principals. Participant 3 reported that her mentor did not have to help her navigate issues of race because her “district was predominantly African American” (in terms of students, faculty, and staff). She did share that she knew of other Black female assistant principals who had experienced racial tensions in their roles at other school districts, but she had not. Participant 6 stated that while she had no direct issues with race as an assistant principal in her district, being a Black female was “was definitely, always present in my mind” (I36) and did impact how she

engaged with her faculty, staff, and peer colleagues. She discussed being careful about overemphasizing or appearing to overprioritize Black students, issues, and holidays so that she would not offend or isolate her very diverse school and student population. She recalls,

Am I over-celebrating African American history? Did we put the same effort for Hispanic heritage? Am I focusing solely on Hispanic heritage? What did I do for the Asian-American Pacific Islanders month? Just making sure that I was cognizant of bringing in what everyone brings to the table” (138-39).

Participant 13 shared that her mentor did not have to help her navigate race issues related to her position as an assistant principal, but she did have to help her address gender specific conflicts she had with her Black, male principal (not feeling respected or valued as a contributor to the leadership team).

The 10 participants who shared how their mentors helped them address issues of race related to their assistant principal positions used words and phrases such as “people were hesitant [of my abilities because of my race, gender, and age]” (P1, 141)), “disrespect(ed/ful)” (P2, 1105; P4, 140; & P11, 155), [having to endure an] “extra battle” (being both Black and female) (P8, 180), “clear discrimination” (P10, 157), or “bias/racism” (P12, 161) to describe their encounters or interactions with faculty, staff, colleagues, and superiors. Participant 7 shared that although she and her mentor did not discuss any issues she had with race as an assistant principal, once she became the principal of the school, she did talk to her mentor about how to address parent or staff lack of respect for her position as a Black female school leader.

Literature supports the claims of the study participants having to address issues of race as Black female school leaders. Microaggression, intersectionality concerns, and racial tensions are pervasive concerns for school leaders, particularly Black females, in a nation that has become

both highly racially and politically charged (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Burton et al., 2020; Edwards, 2016; Harris, 2020; Lomotey, 2019; McClary, 2019; Olow, 2021; Jang & Alexander, 2022; Randolph, 2015; Robinson, 2014). Schools are often seen as microcosms of society, therefore, the negativity and overall distrust for people of alternate races and/or genders in society is becoming a growing concern in American Public Schools as well (Booth, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Lomotey, 2019).

Finding 5

Participants indicated that mentoring improved specific leadership skills and helped them navigate challenges as assistant principals. Data showed that 100% of the participants ($n=13$) were able to describe at least one specific leadership skill that they learned or that was strengthened because of their mentoring experience. Six of the 13 (46.2%) participants recalled two or more leadership or specific skills of the assistant principal that were honed through their mentorships. Leadership skills associated with the assistant principal position included: effective communication ($n=6$), school operations and people management skills ($n=8$), instructional knowledge ($n=3$), racial or social climate navigation ($n=10$), and how to address conflicts regarding female leadership ($n=8$). Participants reported becoming “more confident” (P5, l41) and “less anxious” (P4, l53) in their roles as assistant principals as their leadership skills improved through mentoring. Participant 12 referred to mentoring as an investment as someone takes ownership of another’s development and learning for their long-term success. Participant 1 spoke of how beneficial it was to have her principal, who was an informal mentor to her, was by her side always. Participant 4 and P9 both attested that they became stronger instructional leaders as their mentors aided them in better interpreting student data, curriculum, and instruction.

Consistent with the literature, participant's sentiments echoed the work of several researchers who have noted the benefits of effective mentoring partnerships (Dauble & Gharib, 2019; Eby & Robertson, 2020; Irby, 2015; Jernigan et al., 2020). Assistant principal leadership capacity is significantly impacted by a consistent, intentional, and goal-oriented mentorship with a supervising principal or other education leader who has previously served in the role (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Barnett et al., 2017; Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Hayes, 2019; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Ryan, 2011; Stewart, 2016; Sun, 2018; Williams, 2019; Zepeda et al., 2012). For Black female assistant principals, particularly those addressing harsh racial climates or serving challenging, high-poverty student populations, mentoring is a key determinant of their success or ascension to the principalship (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Bartanen et al., 2021; Edwards, 2016; Harris, 2020; McClary, 2019; Swain, 2016; Randolph, 2015; Robinson, 2014). Assistant principal leadership development is crucial to improving student outcomes as they develop teacher capacity and improve learning culture and climate within their respective schools (Stewart, 2016).

Finding 6

Participants indicated that mentoring improved their self-confidence as assistant principals. All participants expressed gratitude for their mentoring processes improving their self-confidence in their abilities to perform well in the role of assistant principal. Three participants noted that their informal mentors built up their self-confidence after (what they perceived as) past poor mentoring experiences (P1 & P2). Participant 2 shared that her mentor (Black male principal) invested in her personal development and well-being for the largest portion of their weekly talks. She recalls, "15 min was dedicated to the operations of the building. The rest of the time--25 to 30 min was about me" (I146).

Some participants conveyed that their mentors helped them learn that it was ok to be themselves as Black female school leaders (P6, P8, & P13). Participant 6 recalled having the song “Cupid Shuffle” playing on the intercom one day at school so that students knew that she was unashamed of listening to urban music and dancing when she felt joyful. Participant 8 remembered being so encouraged that she could let her “hair down” at a party when the school district’s Chief of Schools (a Black female) began to dance to urban music during a holiday party showing her it was okay to be a leader and have fun as a Black female without being judged. Participant 13 remembered that all her mentors (Black females) taught her how to present herself as a “Black female who is successful” (I35) at all times.

Other participants recalled how their mentors saw things in them that they did not or could not yet see in themselves (P2, P11, & P12). Participant 2’s formal mentor (her Black male principal) taught her to defend herself and not to allow others to disrespect her at any time during her tenure as an assistant principal because he “saw greatness” (I208) in her and wanted to see her excel as a school leader. Participant 11 was grateful for her informal mentor, her godmother (Black female) who was an educator for over 27 years. She stated that her godmother, “saw in me all the things” (I215) and “continued to plant... and water the seeds for me to eventually become a teacher and to become a school leader” (I216).

Studies indicate that self-confidence development is one of the key indicators of a successful mentoring relationship (Allen et al., 1995; Barnett et al., 2017; Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Craft et al., 2016; Gurley et al., 2015; Harris, 2020; Hausman et al., 2002; Lester et al., 2011; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Marshall & Phelps, 2016; Parfitt & Rose, 2020; Ryan, 2011; Searby et al., 2017; Spillane & Lee, 2014). For Black females, self-confidence development is crucial to their ability to manage the stressors that school level leadership present

in conjunction with the social and political pressures of present society (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Harris, 2020; McClary, 2019; Randolph, 2015). All participants noted how their self-confidence levels improved their ability to successfully perform in the role as assistant principal which was consistent with the work of Swain (2016) who found an improvement in assistant principal capacity with improved self-confidence.

Finding 7

Participants indicated that, while mentoring was helpful, it could have been more helpful if structured differently. All participants indicated that their self-confidence and leadership skills were improved through their formal and/or informal mentoring experiences (Table 16); however, they all noted areas where mentoring could be improved to possibly have greater perceived impact for Black female assistant principal leadership. Of the eight participants who received formal mentors from their school districts, six (75.0%) indicated that improvements should be made to the mentoring process to deepen the experience. Three of the eight (37.5%) participants who were formally assigned mentors by their school districts still sought out additional, informal mentors because of either dissatisfaction or a lack of fulfillment in their experiences (P1, P2, & P8).

Nine of the 13 (69.2%) participants indicated that their mentoring experiences instilled in them the desire to pursue advanced educational leadership positions at the school or district level (Table 18); however, all nine participants did not indicate that their desire was associated with their formal mentoring processes. Six of the nine (66.7%) participants who indicated a desire to pursue advanced education leadership positions had informal mentors, whom they'd sought out on their own, absent or in lieu of a formal, district mentoring process for assistant principals. Researchers suggests that Black female assistant principals indicate intentional mentoring

partnerships are essential for measured effectiveness and to improve succession pipelines for school districts (Jean-Marie, 2013; Moore, 2013; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018).

Three of the four categories presented in Table 17—*meeting frequency/consistency*, *commitment/intentionality*, and *gender/race considerations*—all suggest a necessity for greater structure in developing and implementing assistant principal mentoring programs and partnerships. Participant 1 and P6 stated that increased *meeting frequency and/or consistency* would have improved their mentoring experiences. Participant 6 specifically advised that strategy would have made a difference in her mentoring experience, pointing out that her mentor’s advice was helpful, but that she only saw him “five times” (I69) throughout that school year. Participant 2, P9, P11, and P12 pointed to more *intentionality* in the mentor/mentee pairing process for greater results. Participant 2 and P9 stated that having a Black female mentor would have meant a lot to them for emotional and relational support as they navigated school districts that were predominantly White.

The indication that some participants suggested that a lack of systematic structure impeded their experiences is consistent with ongoing, general mentoring partnership research (Eby & Robertson, 2020; Irby, 2015; Jernigan et al., 2020; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Jernigan et al. (2020) asserted that mentoring for professional development requires “intentional or formalized programs or structures” (p. 7). Participant’s sentiment that an effective structure is or was needed in their formal assistant principal mentoring programs aligns with the findings of several scholars who note that formal programs provide the structure and consistency needed for effective mentoring processes for school leaders (Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Jones & Larwin, 2015; McClary, 2019; Zepeda et al., 2012). Hayes and Burkett (2021), in their qualitative study of a pilot, university-led assistant principal coaching program, captured a comment from an assistant

principal who emphatically stated, “there’s no structured professional development course for assistant principals... APs need professional development, too” (p. 13).

Implications

Upon review of the seven findings, initially six implications emerged for school districts, policymakers, and/or principal preparation programs. After synthesis and refining, the six implications became three core implications with some implications associated with multiple findings.

Implication 1: Practice

District leaders should create a structured, research-based, mentoring framework to best support assistant principals. All participants concluded that the structure of their mentoring experiences had either a negative or positive impact on their growth and development as assistant principals. Responses to Interview Question 8 indicated that structure was deemed a key element as participants provided examples and context to measure the effectiveness of mentoring on their leadership skill development and/or self-confidence. District leaders could collaborate with principal preparation program directors to design intentional and specific mentoring frameworks and processes that will develop and improve assistant principal leadership. Special attention should be given to include equity and diversity practices within the mentoring framework to potentially meet the needs of diverse populations of leaders, such as Black females. Establishing a district mentoring framework to build the leadership capacity and self-confidence of assistant principals could create viable and sustainable pipelines for a district to address school principal resignations, retirements, or relocations. This implication is associated with Findings 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Implication 2: Principal Preparation Program Leaders

Principal Preparation Program Leaders could incorporate more field experiences, including mentors, into their programming to improve assistant principals' readiness for the position. Participants all indicated that there were many unknowns about the assistant principalship even after having completed principal preparation programs at their respective colleges and universities. Much of the work of the assistant principal is learned “on the job” (P10); therefore, early mentoring opportunities at the preparation level could provide more insight and opportunities for reflection prior to the candidate beginning their first tenure as an assistant principal. Principal preparation programs could also consider offering trainings to districts that would develop the mentoring acumen of current school principals, so that they are more adequately prepared to develop and support their assistant principals as they enter their school buildings to serve alongside them (Cohen & Schechter, 2019a; Gurley et al., 2015; Hunt, 2011; Ryan, 2011; Winemiller, 2019). This implication is associated with Finding 2.

Implication 3: Policymakers

Policymakers should consider ways to increase funding for mentoring programs specifically designed for assistant principals in K-12 public school settings. As policymakers consider ways to increase the academic return on investment in K-12 public schools, efforts to close gaps in knowledge for assistant principals should be considered. Assistant principals are charged with building teacher instructional and classroom management capacity. They are also responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of teachers in the classroom. An investment in the leadership capacity and self-confidence of assistant principals could pay dividends as they are better equipped to serve their principals and respective school teams. Maine, Illinois, and Washington state presently have begun to use legislative monies to invest in mentoring programs

and services for assistant principal development to help improve student learning outcomes. This implication is associated with Finding 7.

Recommendations for Future Studies

From the findings and implications of this qualitative study exists the ability for future researchers to delve deeply into the association between mentoring and assistant principal leadership and self-confidence. Recommendations for future studies include suggestive topics of exploration that could serve to begin or to examine, evaluate, and modify existing mentoring programs for assistant principals.

- Conduct a similar quantitative or even a mixed methods study to better integrate the qualitative and quantitative data and achieve greater insight.
- Increase the sample size of assistant principals included in the study to get a better representative of the population and possibly more accurate results.
- Localize the setting to one school district or even within one state to better contextualize a local environment, culture, and its resources.
- Consider a study that includes assistant principals of other minority groups for added variability.

Summary

Chapter 5 provided a summary of the study findings, implications for policymakers, practice, and principal preparation program leaders, as well as recommendations for future studies. Mentoring has long been recognized as a valuable tool for personal and professional development. The participants of this study were Black female assistant principals, and their insight into their mentoring experiences revealed a growing need for increased and improved mentoring support for assistant principals in K-12 public schools. Examining the experiences of

mentoring for Black female assistant principals also revealed its perceived impact on their self-confidence and leadership skills. By investing in mentoring programs and creating opportunities for mentorship, educational institutions and school districts can contribute to the development of confident and effective Black female assistant principals. Ultimately, this will lead to a more diverse and inclusive educational leadership landscape.

Personal Reflection

The beautiful women and men who poured into me in my early days as a public-school ELA teacher paved the way for this love project. Even before adulthood, I can still fondly recall the efforts of strong, particularly, Black females, who mentored me as a young lady. Mentoring has widespread implications for children, youth, and adults and I state that emphatically because I am a personal testimony of what mentorship can do. The people of my community, at my African Methodist Episcopal Christian private school, and at my church all taught me valuable life skills, increased my knowledge and pride in my culture as a Black female, and instilled in me a strong desire to pursue education at all costs. Mentors open the door for someone to see what they are not yet able to see in themselves. Mentors also provide the wisdom and guidance essential for role progression and potential ascension. For Black women assistant principals, this is pivotal, as some may grapple with insecurities, imposter syndrome, and/or belief that they lack essential leadership skills to adequately perform in the role. It is my hope that school districts and principal preparation program directors will earnestly pursue purposeful and intentional mentoring programs that best meet the needs of Black female assistant principals, particularly those serving at underperforming schools, to improve student learning outcomes for all students.

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Appendix A

Demographic Survey for Interview Participants

Please complete the anonymous survey below as a means for the researcher to collect demographic information for the study.

Research Title: *Examining the experiences of mentoring to develop current and former Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership skills (IRB #23-759)*

The purpose of this study is to identify the perspectives of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership capacity development.

Email latrese@vt.edu with any questions you may have.

* Indicates required question

1. What is your assigned participant number provided in your follow up email (if you have misplaced the email, please let the researcher know)? **Mark only one oval.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13

2. In what state do you live? **Mark only one oval.*

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii

- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

3. What was the demographic setting of your student population where you served as an assistant principal (while being mentored)? **Mark only one oval.*
- urban
 - suburban
 - rural
 - other
4. How many years did you continue to serve as an assistant principal after being mentored? ** Mark only one oval.*
- at least 1 year
 - 2-5 years
 - over 5 years
5. How would you describe the climate of your school where you served as an assistant principal (while being mentored)? ** Mark only one oval.*
- People felt engaged, respected, and/or safe daily.
 - People felt engaged, respected, and/or safe mostly.
 - People felt engaged, respected, and/or safe occasionally or infrequently.
 - People seldom felt engaged, respected, and/or safe.
6. Which best describes your current role in education? *
- Assistant principal
 - Principal
 - Central office employee
 - State education employee
 - Education consultant
 - Higher education instructor/employee
 - I am no longer in the field of education
7. Do you aspire to pursue a building principalship, higher education position, or other educational leadership position (i.e. state, U.S. Education Dept., etc., Education Policy/Advocacy) as a result/because of your mentoring experience? ** Mark only one oval.*
- Yes
 - No
 - Unsure

Appendix B
CITI Certificate



Completion Date 10-Oct-2021
Expiration Date 09-Oct-2024
Record ID 44820475

This is to certify that:

Latrese Younger

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification
through CME.

Social & Behavioral Research

(Curriculum Group)

Social & Behavioral Research

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w6b381909-1f3c-4b49-a764-a32df0ee0683-44820475

Appendix C

Email to members of Black Women Education Leaders, Inc.

Dear BWEL member,

I am presently soliciting your help in conducting a research study in fulfillment for my doctoral degree requirements. Your participation in the study would include an interview process to advance your thoughts, perspectives, and beliefs for the sake of the study being conducted. The title of my proposed study is *Examining the experiences of mentoring to develop current and former Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership skills*. In alignment with our mission statement, your participation helps ensure that research is advanced pertaining to the amplification and advancement of Black female education leaders. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

If you are interested and qualify to participate in the study please respond to this email invitation within 48 hours. A Doodle Poll link will be issued via email for you to schedule a day and time for your interview. You will also receive an Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study to learn more about the details of participation. **Should you schedule your interview and later conclude you are no longer interested in participating in the study, simply feel free to cancel the Doodle Poll scheduled date and time within 48 hours.** Attached is a flyer that will be issued on social media to solicit participation in the study. I am requesting that if you are not interested or do not qualify for inclusion in the study, you kindly share the flyer with potential study participants you may know.

The interview process, consisting of nine questions from a scripted interview protocol process, should take between 45-minutes to 1-hour to complete. The interview will take place via Zoom. All information will be kept confidential, and your specific interview results will be

displayed anonymously. Your personal contact information is only required to schedule the interview.

Your voice is valuable, and your story deserves to be told to open the door to further research studies on Black female education leaders across the country.

Yours in education service,

Latrese D. Younger

Doctoral Candidate

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Appendix D

Sample Flyer Advertising the Research Study



QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY



IRB # 23-759

*Examining the experiences
of mentoring to develop
current and former Black
female assistant principals'
self-confidence and
leadership skills*

AM I ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

- Black female* who served as an Assistant Principal for at least one year in a K-12 public school setting between 2013-2023
- Current practicing Black female Assistant Principal in a K-12 public school setting for a minimum of one year
- Worked with a formal or informal leadership mentor at the start of your Assistant Principal tenure
- U.S. Citizen/Resident

*Black or biracial and identify as a Black female.



**TO PARTICIPATE IN
THE STUDY, SCAN THE
QR CODE OR EMAIL:**



Latrese Younger, Doctoral
Candidate at Virginia Tech
University
latrese@vt.edu

Appendix E

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study



Principal Investigator: Dr. M. David Alexander

IRB# and Title of Study: IRB # 23-759 *Examining the experiences of mentoring to develop current and former Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership skills*

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions.

I am a doctoral candidate in the Virginia Tech Educational Leadership and Policy Program at Virginia Tech, and I am conducting this research in fulfillment of my dissertation completion.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?

If you decide to participate in this study by responding to the flyer/request, you will be contacted via email with a Doodle Poll to schedule a time, date, for a 45-minute to 1- hour Zoom semi-structured interview. You will be asked nine open-ended questions about your mentor and mentoring experiences and your perceptions of leadership skill development and/or self-confidence improvement while serving as an assistant principal. You will solely engage with the researcher, Latrese Younger, although your identification information will be able to be accessed by the principal investigator listed on this letter. The interviews will be audio and video recorded and transcribed through Zoom. Handwritten notes by the researcher will be taken in addition to recordings and transcriptions to be utilized in data analysis. All research will conclude by October 2023 and notification will be issued to all research participants via email regarding the conclusion of the study. We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Should you schedule your interview and later conclude you are no longer interested in participating in the study, simply feel free to cancel the Doodle Poll scheduled date and time within 48 hours. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality.

You will be assigned an alphanumeric code for added privacy and to conceal your identity. Any specific characteristics will be altered to fully protect interviewees. All interviewees will receive access to the Zoom transcription via email to review responses for accuracy after the interview. Data from the study (including the Zoom transcript, audio and video data) will be stored securely on the researcher's private laptop and within the Virginia Tech Google Drive assigned to the researcher. Files will also be housed on the researcher's Hard Drive for additional protection from potential loss and/or in case of study personnel changes at Virginia Tech. The interview video/audio and all corresponding data will be destroyed within three years of the researcher's successful dissertation defense.

WHO CAN I TALK TO?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, Latrese D Younger or the Principal Investigator, Dr. M. David Alexander at the College of Liberal Arts & Human Sciences, School of Education, Educational Leadership Program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (540-231-9723 or mdavid@vt.edu). You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office at 540-231-3732 (irb@vt.edu).

Please print out a copy of this information sheet for your records.

Appendix F

Email to Initial Respondents Requesting Participation in the Study

Dear Education Colleague,

Thank you for emailing to participate in the research study which will advance your thoughts, perspectives, and beliefs for the sake of the study being conducted. The title of my proposed study is *Examining the experiences of mentoring to develop current and former Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership skills*. Attached is the [Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study](#) to learn more about the details of participation.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. This Doodle Poll link (will be attached) is for you to schedule a day and time for your Zoom interview within the next 24 hours. **Should you schedule your interview and later conclude you are no longer interested in participating in the study, simply feel free to cancel the Doodle Poll scheduled date and time within 48 hours.**

The interview process, consisting of nine questions from a scripted interview protocol process, should take no more than 45-minutes to 1-hour to complete. All information will be kept confidential, and your specific interview results will be displayed anonymously. Your personal contact information is only required to schedule the interview.

Your voice is valuable, and your story deserves to be told to open the door to further research studies on Black female education leaders across the country.

Yours in education service,

Latrese D. Younger

Doctoral Candidate

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Appendix G

Interview Protocol for Participants

Name of Previous or Current Assistant Principal:

_____ Interview Date: _____

Introduction (5 minutes):

Hello, _____, my name is Latrese Younger, and I am so grateful that you accepted the invitation to meet with me today. Please state your name for the record. The nine questions I have provided to you in advance will aid in the development of my research study as I gather perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes about the mentoring experiences of Black female assistant principals. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to identify the perspectives of mentoring on Black female assistant principals' self-confidence and leadership capacity development. Your voice is valued and there are no right or wrong responses to any of the questions that will be asked. Please stop me at any time if you have a clarifying question and/or would like for me to slow my pace in questioning. At this time, I will ask for your oral consent to record this interview, in addition to the already issued written consent to record you via both video and audio functionality in Zoom. You will be emailed a copy of the transcript to review for accuracy. As a reminder, I and the principal researcher described on your consent form will have access to this information shared today. Before we begin, do you have any specific questions regarding the questions provided and/or the research collection and storage process at this time? [The interviewer will answer any questions. If there are none, the interviewer will proceed to question number one.]

Additional Notes:

Probing questions/phrases may be organically developed during the conversation and used at intervals throughout the interview to provide clarity and/or depth of responses for the interviewer (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interview Questions:

1. Please describe your mentor in terms of the person's gender, race, age, and role in education.
2. Describe whether your relationship with your mentor was formal or informal.
3. How did mentoring help you navigate any challenges in your role as an assistant principal?
4. Were issues of race and gender discussed with your mentor?
5. How often did or do you and your mentor talk or meet?
6. Provide an example of any specific leadership skills improved through your mentoring experience.
7. Please explain why you believe your mentoring experience improved or did not improve your self-confidence as an assistant principal.
8. In your opinion, what specifically could have or did make the mentoring process meaningful for you?
9. Do you believe you are (or if currently an assistant principal, will be) successful because of your mentoring experience or mentoring program? Why do you believe this?

Appendix H

Alignment of Interview Protocol Questions to Literature Review and Research Question

Research Question	Aligned Protocol Questions	Literature Review Source
<p>1. How do Black female assistant principals perceive the effectiveness of their current or past mentoring programs on their leadership development and confidence?</p> <p>Sub Question: Do Black female assistant principals indicate that their race had any impact on their ability to perform in their roles successfully?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Please describe your mentor in terms of the person's gender, race, age, and role in education. ● Describe whether your relationship with your mentor was formal or informal. ● Did mentoring help you navigate any challenges in your role as an assistant principal? ● Were issues of race and gender discussed with your mentor? ● How often did or do you and your mentor talk or meet? ● Provide an example of any specific leadership skills improved through your mentoring experience. ● Please explain why you believe your mentoring experience improved or did not improve your self- 	<p>Allen & Weaver, 2014; Armstrong, 2015; Barnett et al., 2017; Bartanen et al., 2021; Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Cohen & Schechter, 2019; Eby & Robertson, 2020; Goldring et al., 2021; Gurley et al., 2015; Harris, 2020; Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Hu et al., 2022; Kruse & Krum, 2016; Leitner et al., 2018; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; McClary, 2019; Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021; Meschitti & Smith, 2017; Olow, 2021; Randolph, 2015; Robnett et al., 2018; Robinson, 2014; Searby et al., 2017; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Stewart, 2016; Sun & Shoho, 2017; Tarbutton, 2019; Williams, 2019; Winemiller, 2019</p>

confidence as an assistant principal.

- In your opinion, what specifically could have or did make the mentoring process meaningful for you?
- Do you believe you are (or if currently an assistant principal, will be) successful because of your mentoring experience or mentoring program? Why do you believe this?