

Principal Perceptions on the Impact of Leadership Development Attributed to the
Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program

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ABSTRACT

The role of the school principal is second only to classroom instruction in terms of its impact on student achievement. Due to the evolving needs of students, schools, and school districts, the training of new principals should not end once they assume their first position. Research shows that while preparation programs designed to accredit new principals are critical, a growing body of literature is calling attention to the importance of professional growth opportunities that will further the development of educational leaders and address the day-to-day challenges of the role. To support this need, a number of research-based programs that are aligned with national educational leader standards create potentially valuable opportunities for ongoing professional development for principals.

This qualitative study was designed to describe the perceptions and experiences of the recently appointed principals who participated in the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program (RAAP) and to examine how the RAAP contributed to their leadership development as a principal. Specifically, two questions guided this study: 1) How did principal participants indicate the RAAP contributed to their role as a principal? 2) What were the perceptions of principal participants regarding the impact of the RAAP on their leadership development? Three sources of data were used to generate findings: a demographic survey, primary data in the form of the transcription from a single focus group interview, and secondary data in the form of reflective synopses from 16 participants who took part in either the 2017, 2018, or 2019 program year. Four major findings supported by participant statements arose from this study: (a) participation in the RAAP informed them of the benefits of self-reflection and the awareness of self-care and balance as a principal, (b) by participating in the RAAP they found value in networking and building collegial relationships to overcome challenges as a recently appointed principal, (c) participation in the RAAP strengthened their leadership skills and increased their confidence, and (d) participation increased their knowledge and their ability to create actionable steps to support and implement new initiatives and programs in their schools. Implications for practice and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was designed to describe the perceptions and experiences of the recently appointed principals who participated in the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program (RAAP) and to examine how the RAAP contributed to their leadership development as a principal. Two questions guided the development of this investigation: 1) How did principal participants indicate the RAAP contributed to their role as a principal? 2) What were the perceptions of principal participants regarding the impact of the RAAP on their leadership development? Three sources of data were used to generate findings: a demographic survey, the transcription from a single focus group interview, and secondary data from the reflective synopses of 16 participants who took part in either the 2017, 2018, or 2019 program year. Four major findings arose from this study: (a) participants indicated that participation in the RAAP informed them of the benefits of self-reflection and the awareness of self-care and balance as a principal, (b) participants indicated that by participating in the RAAP they found value in networking and building collegial relationships to overcome challenges as a recently appointed principal, (c) participants indicated that participation in the RAAP strengthened their leadership skills and increased their confidence, and (d) participants indicated that participation increased their knowledge and their ability to create actionable steps to support and implement new initiatives and programs in their schools. The findings from this study reinforce cited research on the importance of ongoing leadership development training and professional learning experiences beyond principal preparation programs for the recently appointed principal.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family—and especially my dad, the late Earl E. Smith Jr., and my mother, Carrie Smith. As the youngest of four, I was blessed to have been raised in a home full of love and support my entire life, even throughout my adulthood. Although my dad’s time with us ended unexpectedly, and without him having had the opportunity to see me graduate from college, he always believed in me and encouraged me in every aspect of my life. I know he would be proud of me. He was the best! My mother, a hard-working, faithful, and wise woman has always filled my cup with encouragement, pride, and courage; she has always reinforced that I can do anything I set my mind to. Both of my parents were educated during segregation and knew the importance of education. They removed barriers to ensure that I and my siblings would have a seat at the table. It’s because of the both of them that I had the grit and discipline to achieve this goal.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Sherman. He has been with me through my educational-leadership journey and has always been my cheerleader. A quiet leader himself, he understands my drive and creates a home that is loving and supportive every day: from cooking, cleaning, and making sure I am taken care of mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally. He is my rock; I couldn’t have done this without him.

My faith in God, the grace and mercy He has shown me has undoubtedly been the reason for my successes in life. My daily walk with Him during this humbling experience is evident that I am doing His will. I am not sure what is next, but with God I am excited and in anticipation of what he has in store for me as Dr. Jennifer Smith Rucker!

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Finally, to the best group of educators I have had the privilege of getting to know and grow with: my cohort members. We shared one goal: to graduate in 2021. The respect and mutual support between all members of this group of people surpass all expectations. It is rare to engage with so many accomplished goal-seeking individuals who consistently had each other's back. We cried together, laughed together, worked together, and supported one another for three years. We rallied together when times got tough and lifted one another up when we felt as though we weren't going to make it. I could not ask for a better group of people with whom to take on this monumental task. I have made lifelong friends and am thankful to know every one of them! We will forever be connected: #VTDoc2021.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Wallace Foundation (2011) pointed to the importance of the role of the principal with respect to educational outcomes.

Education research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal. (p. 2)

Due to the ever changing role of the principal and the level of impact this individual can have on student learning, principals should have regular opportunities to take part in professional learning experiences that will help them meet the challenges of their position (National Policy Board of Education Administration, 2015). The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) indicated that “many of today’s preparation programs are irrelevant to and inadequate in developing the skills and competencies required for the principalship” (NASSP, 2017, p. 3). In addition, “understanding challenges during school leaders’ induction phase may serve to inform the structure and curriculum of school leader preparation programs” (Beam, Claxton, & Samuel, 2016, p. 146).

Learning Forward (2019), a national professional association that supports professional learning for all educators, provides a clear and concise definition of professional learning as involving activities that . . .

. . . (A) are an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators...with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet the challenging State academic standards; and (B) are sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused. (Learning Forward, 2019, p. 1)

Rowland (2017) emphasized that principals must have opportunities throughout their careers to be trained, developed, and supported in consistent ways that reflect modern, evidence-based standards. Accordingly, opportunities for professional learning that meet the 21st century needs of the educators should incorporate their perspectives and experiences to ensure that any areas of weakness can be strengthened.

Overview of the Study

This basic phenomenological qualitative study examined the perceptions of 16 principals who participated in the 2017, 2018, and 2019 Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program (RAAP). While this residential program includes a varied group of recently appointed leaders, the findings from this investigation reflect the perceptions of those who were in the role of principal at the time of program participation. The perceptions of respondents were assessed with the goal of determining how their participation contributed to their role as a recently appointed principal, as well as clarifying the impact of the program on their leadership development.

Secondary data in the form of previously submitted reflective synopses from subjects were analyzed by the researcher. These reflective synopses reflect what the participant had “seen, heard, and done to make meaning from their experiences” (School Leaders Institute, 2020, p. 1). The researcher collected data via an interview instrument developed by the researcher. Collected data were analyzed to determine potential themes with respect to respondent’s perceptions of the impact of leadership development.

Historical Perspective

Immediately following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, “Congress passed Public Law 89-10, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA, the parent of 2001’s No Child Left Behind, NCLB, and 2015’s Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA” (Owings & Kaplan, 2020, p. 40). ESEA consisted of five programs created to fiscally support the education of specific student populations, one of which is Title II. Initially created to develop and enhance instructional resources, Title II funding was created in an effort to “strengthen the country’s economic competitiveness and national security” (Owings & Kaplan, 2020, p. 41). Today Title II funding is primarily used to recruit and develop teachers and principals through professional development (Owings & Kaplan, 2020). Guidance on implementing ESSA encourages each State Educational Agency (SEA) to devote a significant portion of its state activity funds to improving school leadership. Additionally, ESSA guidelines recommend reserving an additional 3 percent of Title II, Part A, for activities that support principals or other school leaders (ESSA, 2015).

The importance of developing skilled school leaders is not only underscored by their rigorous professional practice standards, but has also been emphasized by the federal government for decades. In a yearlong study conducted by NASSP and the Learning Policy Institute, one of the overarching reasons for continuous professional development is consistent with an “enormous range of knowledge and skills” needed by principals (Levin, Bradley, & Scott, 2019, p. 9). The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) outline foundational leadership practices that support student learning by guiding the practices of educational leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administrators, 2015). The Standards “embody a research-and practice-based understanding of the relationship between educational leadership and student learning” (National Policy Board for Educational Administrators, 2015, p. 3). PSEL Standards focus not only on human relationships and the ability to envision and plan for future challenges, but also to “inspire education leaders to stretch themselves and reach a level of excellence in their practice, no matter where they are in their careers” (National Policy Board of Educational Administrators, 2015, p. 3). Included in the 10 PSEL Standards are specifics related to ongoing learning to support the professional development and innovation skills of school leaders so they can meet the challenges of improving schools and increasing student achievement (National Policy Board for Educational Administrators, 2015). To meet these challenges, there is a recognition and understanding that the standards are “created for and by the profession to guide professional practice and how practitioners are prepared, hired, developed, supervised and evaluated” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015 p. 2).

Statement of the Problem

School leadership is second to classroom instruction in importance in terms of its potential for helping students grow and achieve (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013). ESSA provides autonomy to SEAs regarding the implementation of Title II, Part A funding; as such, the recommended 3% reserved funding is not guaranteed to support the professional learning of principals at the division level (New Leaders 2018). “ESSA, if implemented properly, can serve as the driver of a social change in the context of schools by recognizing well-trained principals as vital resources in schools, particularly those serving disadvantaged students” (Beesley & Clark, 2015; Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010). Therefore, principals who are properly prepared through effective professional development opportunities,

as outlined in ESSA, can be pivotal in enhancing student learning outcomes, particularly in low-performing schools (Beesley & Clark, 2015; Loeb et al., 2010).

However, the high nationwide turnover rate of educational leaders points to the day-to-day complexities and pressures of the job, which will undermine the potential of improvement efforts necessary for student learning (Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, 2015). Compounding the problem is that a lack of professional development also contributes to high turnover for school leaders. Research conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2013) concluded principals who did not receive professional development were 1.4 times more likely to leave their schools than those who participated in professional development.

Significance of the Study

“Leader preparation should not end when new principals are hired, but should continue with high-quality mentorship and career-long growth opportunities” (Shelton, 2012, p. 3). Members of national and state educational organizations who support the creation and availability of ongoing and effective principal professional development opportunities share this belief. At the national level, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) recognizes the need to collaborate in an effort to “help school leaders overcome challenges and most effectively transform education for the future” (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2018). NASSP’s mission of supporting principals goes beyond their mission statement. In addition to their national conference that offers opportunities for K-12 school leaders to collaborate with peers and engage with educational leaders from around the world, their online platform also provides year-round access to online professional development through webinars and modules aligned to research (NASSP, 2018). Similarly, an affiliate member of NASSP, the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP), which is the “statewide advocacy and outreach professional organization for school principals and assistant principals” (VASSP, 2020), is also committed to improving student achievement through such development opportunities.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) also acknowledges the expanding role of the principal and the need to provide ongoing support by creating avenues for continual professional development (NAESP, 2020). By partnering with government officials, the NAESP’s advocacy program reflects the voices of many principals in support of federal funding for preparation and training, such as Title II, Part A (NAESP, 2020). NAESP

(2020) also supports early childhood education through professional development and programs targeting educational leaders. In association with the School Superintendents Association (AASA) the NAESP has created a yearlong professional learning experience that supports the aspiring principal, ensuring that those seeking to become a principal will have the skills and knowledge required to excel at the next level of leadership (NAESP, 2020). Culminating with the annual NAESP conference, online professional learning opportunities and free online webinars also support the ongoing professional development of principals (NAESP, 2020).

In collaboration with VFEL, the Virginia Foundation for Educational Leadership, VASSP recognizes “the importance of providing professional development experiences to administrators that are current, and support the growth of the individual, the establishment and maintenance of a professional learning community” (VASSP, 2020). The VASSP-VFEL Professional Program Series offers a variety of training opportunities customized to meet the needs of the school and school division (VASSP, 2020). For instance, the annual summer conference sponsored by VASSP, VFEL as well as the Virginia Department of Education, provides attendees with up-to-date information related to their role as a school administrator (VASSP, 2020). Collectively, these professional organizations recognize the pivotal role of the principal and the concurrent importance of affording development opportunities to ensure that principals are supported and equipped to meet the challenges of educating students in the 21st century, thus reinforcing the significance of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute, RAAP is a residential program designed to increase leadership skills through collaboration and reflection (School Leaders Institute, 2020). The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of recently appointed principals who participated in the RAAP, with the goal of determining how the RAAP contributed to their leadership development as recently appointed principals. Their perceptions of the impact of program participation were analyzed based on each individual’s reflective synopsis, which is an electronic document created by participants that captures their assessment of the program’s utility (School Leaders Institute, 2020). This data was coupled with information gleaned from focus group interviews of six former RAAP participants from the 2017, 2018, 2019 program years. In summary, this study was designed to capture the impact the program had on each participant’s leadership development during and after the four workshop sessions.

Justification for the Study

Educators new to the role of principal often experience unforeseen challenges not captured in a principal preparation program (Gentilucci, Denti & Guaglianone, 2013). Thus, there is a well-documented need for ongoing professional learning for principals after they assume this critical role (Gentilucci et al., 2013). A goal of one program, the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program (RAAP), is to “help new principals learn the knowledge, skills, and strategies they need in order to be successful on their job” (Eller, 2008, p. 1). The RAAP, which was established in 2007, is a residential learning program for newly appointed school administrators who take part in four thematic workshops, each of which last 2½ days. The program was formally assessed in 2008, with the program evaluation stating that “high quality programming for the support of new principals was confirmed” (Eller, 2008, p. 1). However, the RAAP has not been systematically evaluated since 2008. Thus, an examination of the perceptions of principals in terms of the program’s impact on their leadership development is long overdue.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

RQ 1: How did principal participants indicate the RAAP contributed to their role as a principal?

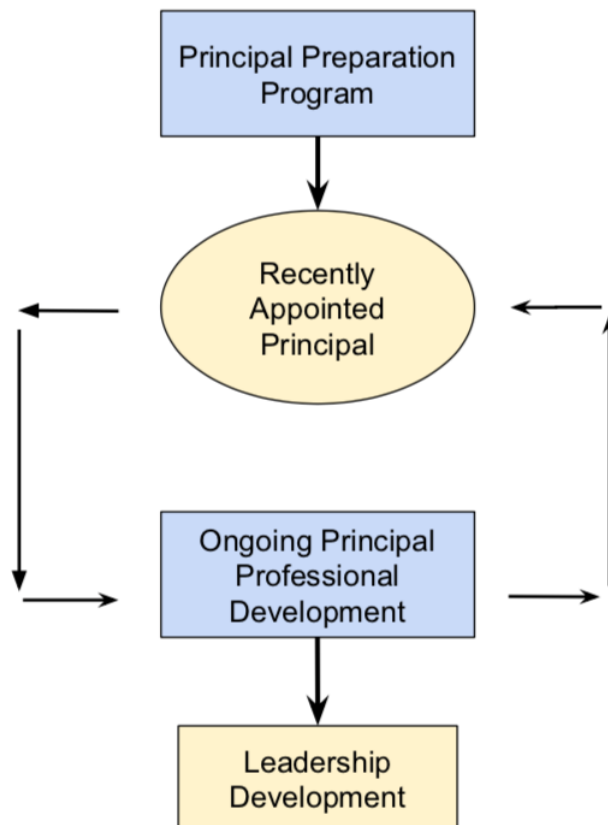
RQ 2: What was the perception of principal participants regarding the impact of the RAAP on their leadership development?

Conceptual Framework

While the pathway to becoming a principal varies, all recently appointed principals receive training within a principal preparation program (PPP) that supports their new educational leadership role. PPPs are designed to provide foundational knowledge and skills so that the new school principal can, so to speak, hit the ground running. After assuming the role, however, ongoing professional development can be essential for strengthening areas of weaknesses and providing opportunities to enhance the knowledge and proficiencies of the recently appointed principal. While PPPs create and build upon leadership characteristics necessary to the role of a recently appointed principal, ongoing professional development has the potential to impact

leadership development and support the evolving role of the principalship. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework used for this research study.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Definition of Terms

Leadership Development: Programs or activities that enhances the skills, abilities and confidence of those aspiring to be or who are in a leadership role.

Ongoing Principal Professional Development: This term refers to professional development opportunities for principals beyond their initial principal preparation program experiences, which are designed to support the day-to-day challenges of the principal.

Principal Preparation Program: A PPP is a state-accredited program that fully or partially prepares educators to receive their licensure as a school principal. This certification can be in the form of a post-master's or master's educational leadership program.

Recently Appointed Principal: A recently appointed principal is an educator entering the role of school principal with 0-3 years of experience.

Limitations

Limitations indicate a number of conditions or potential weaknesses that are beyond the researcher's control (Simon & Goes, 2013). There are four limitations in this study that must be noted. First, this study is wholly qualitative in design; thus, incorporating a quantitative or mixed-methods study might have generated different outcomes via percentages and statistical reporting. Second, when subjects agreed to participate in this investigation, they also agreed to allow someone not serving as a program coordinator to read their reflective synopsis, as well as participate in a focus group. The reflective synopsis assignment was completed during the program and is a personal reflection capturing their thoughts about their educational roles. Thus, potential respondents may have elected not to participate due to the requirement of sharing their synopsis. In short, the data captured for this study reflects a level of self-selection bias. A third limitation pertains of the fact that reflective synopses could not be obtained for the 2017 participant cohort, which limits the broader generalizability of this study's findings. A final limitation was the inability to confirm the number of subjects who elected to participate by cohort year. The number of recently appointed principals within the three cohorts of 2017, 2018, and 2019 may not have included the anticipated sample of 10 recently appointed principals from each cohort.

Delimitations

Delimitations indicate study characteristics defined and implemented by the researcher that may impact a study's results and scope (Simon & Goes, 2014); such factors typically include theoretical foundation, demographic data, selected population, the selection of research questions, and the method of analysis. Although the RAAP includes the participation of recently appointed assistant principals, more experienced principals, and central office leaders, the researcher elected to interview only subjects with the title of "principal" for this research study. Additionally, the years were intentionally selected to provide a meaningful sample related to the

program and the responses of the participants. The selection of the questions used to interview respondents also represents a delimiting factor in this study, as does the limited number of respondents who took part in this investigation. All these researcher-defined study characteristics limit the broader generalizability of this study's findings.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study, including the purpose statement, research questions, and the conceptual framework. Chapter 2 comprises the literature review associated with research pertaining to PPPs and ongoing professional development. Chapter 3 consists of the methodology, data collection procedures, data management and analysis, as well as a timeline for the study. Chapter 4 presents the results from data collection and introduces the salient themes that emerged. Chapter 5 includes the summary of findings, implications, conclusion, and suggestions for future studies.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review examines the scholarly research related to the national standards for recently appointed principals and principal preparation programs. Additionally, an overview of how on-going professional learning programs support the recently appointed principal is provided. Fullan (2014) stated that the role of the principal has become increasingly complex, often involving tasks that principals may not have been required to undertake in decades past. According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (National Association of Secondary School Principals & National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2013, p. 3). There is a need for principals to minimize “the counterproductive actions and specialize in the generative actions that yield positive results” (Fullan, 2014, p. 21). The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL, 2015) states, “The high turnover rate of educational leaders nationwide points to the complexities, responsibilities, and relentless pressures of the job” (p. 6). Significant for the current study, Rangel (2018) correlated principal turnover with the lack of professional development. However, the United States Department of Education (2015) confirmed that less than 4% of Title II funds are used to support school leaders professional learning experiences.

Research Process

The primary method used to obtain scholarly literature for this literature review was through the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) online library search engine. Online search engines such as ERIC, SAGE and Google Scholar were also used to access relevant scholarly literature reports. Additional sources were discovered through references of articles and publications by national organizations were read by the researcher. The search consisted of full text articles, professional journals and dissertations and with a publication year within the last 10 years. Key words and search terms included ESSA, Title II, PSEL standards, principal leadership, school leadership, professional development, principal

preparation programs, new principals, principal perceptions, school leader perception, principal retention, and principal professional development.

The Recently Appointed Principal

Novice, new, and newly appointed are words that are often used when referring to a first-year principal. For purposes of this research study, the researcher has elected to use the term “recently appointed” when referencing an educator who has been serving as a school principal for 0-3 years. As noted in the State Code of Virginia, §8VAC20-23-620, Administration and Supervision PreK-12, to become a building level administrator in the Commonwealth of Virginia, individuals must seek an initial administration and supervision preK-12 endorsement (Virginia Administrative Code, 2018). To obtain this endorsement, the candidate must “earn a master’s degree in a regionally accredited college or university and have completed three years of successful, full time experience in a public school or accredited nonpublic school in an instructional personnel position that requires licensure in VA” (Virginia Administrative Code, 2018). In addition, candidates must complete an internship that is focused on student academic progress, and successfully pass the school leaders licensure assessment required by the Virginia Board of Education. With these requirements met, candidates are qualified to be appointed as a principal. (Virginia Administrative Code, 2018). Although the requirements for assuming the role of principal are rigorous and comprehensive, recently appointed administrators should expect to face unprecedented challenges they may not have anticipated while completing their program requirements (Beam et al., 2016).

Educational Leadership and National Standards

The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) is a consortium of institutions of higher education that collaborates to ensure that educational leaders and programs meet the needs of schools and the students they serve (University Council for Educational Administration, 2020). This nonprofit organization includes more than 100 universities in the United States (and one in Hong Kong) that evaluate and, if needed, challenge the status quo within the field of educational leadership. UCEA also promulgates research designed to improve the profession and leadership practices; its members support the development of educational leaders through the analysis of preparation programs and professional learning of leaders and

professors, while also seeking to influence educational policy at the local, state and national levels (UCEA, 2020).

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), formerly known as The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, were established to ensure that all educational leaders are well versed to meet the challenges of the job while supporting the academic growth and achievement for all students (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). While highly effective teachers are likely to improve classroom achievement and the learning outcomes of individual students, effective principals are poised to have a more significant impact by fostering a learning environment that can facilitate improved teaching and learning (Rothman, 2017). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA; 2015) noted that the following 10 PSEL Standards support student learning by developing school leaders who are skilled in these foundational areas:

- Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values
- Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms
- Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
- Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students
- Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel
- Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
- Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
- Standard 9: Operations and Management, and
- Standard 10: School Improvement

The PSEL standards serve as “a compass that guides the direction of practice directly as well as indirectly through the work of policy makers, professional associations and supporting institutions” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 4). Furthermore, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) states the following: “In all realms of their work, educational leaders must focus on how they are promoting the learning, achievement, development, and well-being of each student” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 2).

In addition to their influence on the development of skilled educational leaders, the PSEL standards serve as a compass for professional organizations and PPPs in creating a framework for best practices (NPBEA, 2015). As such, “The nature and qualities of work articulated in the

Standards serve as a foundation for high-quality professional development opportunities so that educational leaders can continually develop and refine their abilities to excel at their work” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 7). According to NPBEA (2015), the *theory-of-action* approach can bring consistency to university-led or school district-led PPPs and provide a holistic view of leadership to aspiring and current educational leaders.

To ensure consistency with the PSEL standards, the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards, formerly known as the Educational Leadership Constituent Council standards, were created to “guide program design, accreditation review, and state program approval” (National Educational Leadership Preparation, 2018, p.2). While PSEL standards provide an expansive view of educational leadership, NELP standards specifically focus on what recently appointed district leaders should master after completing requirements in a preparation program (NELP, 2018). Similar to the 10 PSEL standards, the eight NELP (2018) standards are used to guide the development of PPPs with the goal of expanding the skills and capabilities of new educational leaders.

- Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Improvement
- Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms
- Standard 3: Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness
- Standard 4: Learning and Instruction
- Standard 5: Community and External Leadership
- Standard 6: Operations and Management
- Standard 7: Building Professional Capacity
- Standard 8: Internship

Collectively, the PSEL and NELP standards provide a roadmap for developing the essential competencies of recently appointed principals so they can meet the administrative and educational challenges they will face as educational leaders.

Principal Preparation Programs and National Standards

Yoder, Freed and Fetters (2014) described principal preparation programs as a formalized program of study that is state-accredited, and which fully or partially prepares educators to receive their certification as a school principal. Therefore, PPPs equip the new principal with the basic tools needed to lead their schools (Grissom, Mitani, & Woo, 2019). According to the

Educational Testing Service (2019), to be appointed as a school administrator in the Commonwealth of Virginia, one must complete coursework that leads to a master's degree or certification in Educational Leadership from an accredited school of higher education, and successfully pass the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA).

Founded in 1954, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) is a non-profit, non-governmental accrediting body with the overarching goal of ensuring the excellence of educator-preparation programs (EPPs) (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2020). Using a rigorous evidenced-based accreditation process, CAEP targets the improvement of educators who support P-12 student learning. While CAEP offers institutional, as well as professional or programmatic accreditation, for this research study programmatic accreditation will be referenced. Thus, CAEP's accreditation process requires data-driven evidence that EPPs are of sufficient high quality to produce educators who are knowledgeable and competent (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2020). The newest CAEP Standards for 2022 reflect months of exhaustive research and the input of educational stakeholders from P-12, state education departments, higher education, and non-profit educational organizations (CAEP, 2020). The following seven standards emerged from this comprehensive undertaking:

- Standard 1: Content and Pedagogical Knowledge
- Standard 2: Clinical Partnerships and Practice
- Standard 3: Candidate Recruitment, Progression, and Support
- Standard 4: Program Impact
- Standard 5: Quality Assurance System and Continuous Improvement
- Standard 6: Fiscal and Administrative Capacity
- Standard 7: Record of Compliance with Title IV of Higher Education Act

Similar to CAEP standards, the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) serve as a guide for developing preparation programs that “provide candidates with intentionally developed school leadership development experiences that connect, embed, and transcend explicit leadership skills within authentic contexts” (NELP, 2018, p. 8). In addition to the ability of the candidate to connect experiences with course content, the preparation program must also include three components essential for an effective school leader: (a) Awareness: the ability to acquire knowledge and procedures; (b) Understanding: the ability to interpret and implement

knowledge and skills that are learned; and (c) Application: the ability to apply what is learned in a new way as opportunities arise (NELP, 2018).

NELP standards directed at preparation-program evaluation are intended to verify that course content is able to connect knowledge with skills aligned to specific assessments (NELP, 2018). Through a qualitative process, programs are evaluated by NELP reviewers using a rubric based on their standards. This evaluation process is used “across educational leadership program reviews while simultaneously creating standards that are flexible and sensitive to a program’s localized contexts” (NELP, 2018, p. 31).

Not surprisingly, PPPs vary from state to state. According to Sun (2011), although 46 states rely on the ISLLC standards, their evaluation and support systems for principals are haphazard and are often not even based on these standards. More significantly, Gill (2012) maintains that, nationwide, strong principal training programs have represented the exception instead of the rule. Accordingly, aspiring and fledgling principals must have access to professional training that prepares them to make enduring instructional impacts, not just to manage people or buildings (Gill, 2012).

Examination of Principal Preparation Programs

Grissom et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal administrative data study to assess the quality of PPPs within the state of Tennessee. Specifically, the researchers examined 12 programs to assess the job performance of new principals, with data reflecting the performance of new principals who had held the role from 0-3 years. Multiple data sources were analyzed to determine correlations, including demographic data from the Tennessee Department of Education, principal preparation program information from the Educational Testing Service, as well as principal evaluation scores obtained through a statewide educator-evaluation system, the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (Grissom et al., 2019). With respect to the correlation between PPPs and the performance of new principals, their findings “point neither toward outstanding principal preparation programs that the state might study to learn what selection or curricular practices work especially well nor toward failing principal preparation programs with whom the state should obviously intervene” (Grissom et al., 2019, p. 106). Upholding the earlier findings of Gill (2012), the researchers also reported that the quality of PPPs varied within the state (Grissom et al., 2019). As a result, the authors stressed the need for future studies that use

“administrative data to evaluate PPPs or identify high-performing programs for purposes of translating their practices to other programs or contexts” (Grissom et al., 2019, p. 1).

Yoder et al. (2014) wrote a research brief measuring the effectiveness of PPPs, asserting that “developing measures that are sound and useful for preparation program review, assessment, and improvement requires a collaborative approach” (p. 8). This awareness of the importance of a collaborative approach has long been understood. Earlier, Armenta and DeVaney (2008) investigated the perceptions of four school district representatives who took part in oral portfolio defenses to determine the correlation between the quality of principal preparation programs and the overall quality of candidates. One purpose of this study was to develop recommendations for enhancing the PPP in terms of knowledge outcomes. In response to focus group questions intended to clarify the individual strengths and weaknesses of each candidate, respondents pointed to the quality of the program, spoke to the importance of mentoring in a collaborative way, and discussed how a general knowledge of program requirements could have helped in supporting candidates (Armenta & DeVaney, 2008). The qualitative data obtained from the school district personnel included “recommendations and mandates for reforming principal preparation programs cite the need for collaboration between all stakeholders, primarily between universities and school districts” (Armenta & DeVaney, 2008, p. 2).

Since 1948, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) has been the leader in educational progress and the development of school leader preparation (Fry-Ahearn & Collins, 2016). Working in collaboration with 16 states in an effort to advance public education, the SREB lamented that “Many universities’ redesign efforts are focused on the wrong things and the pace of change is so slow that it is doubtful that more than a handful will produce a new program that addresses the needs of schools” (SREB, 2006, p.10). Instead, the SREB stressed the important role the principal plays in educational outcomes. Specifically, in its assessment of PPPs, the SREB report discussed four core areas that should be promoted when redesigning PPPs: (a) university and district partnerships, (b) increasing knowledge of instructional leadership to improve student achievement through clinical experiences, (c) field experiences that aligns theory and practice with the support of a mentor, and (d) a meticulous evaluation process that demonstrates the candidate’s mastery of competencies (SREB). In its evaluation of 22 universities that had implemented the core conditions, the report concluded that “universities that made substantial progress on collaborative redesign of principal preparation programs began

by working with local school districts” (SREB, 2006, p. 47). In particular, the report lauded formalized agreements to become partners by high level university and school level administrators, transparency through regularly scheduled meetings, collaboration of criteria used to recruit and select students, and curriculum and program development (SREB, 2006). Significant for the current investigation, the input of the local school district should be considered essential in the design and programmatic outcomes of a university-based leadership program.

In a qualitative study involving telephone interviews, a national random sample of 254 superintendents, 252 school principals, 721 public school teachers, and 1379 parents was used to examine attitudes among major stakeholders in public schools (Johnson, Arumi, & Ott, 2006). Conducted between November 2005 and March 2006, the study confirmed five major findings related to perceptions of public-school effectiveness, teacher quality, and the inequity of resources based on the needs of the school, how to improve teaching, and the importance of better data and fewer bureaucratic mandates (Johnson et al., 2006). Importantly, two-thirds of the surveyed principals indicated that “typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school district” (Johnson, et al., 2006, p. 22).

Johnson and James (2018) also conducted a qualitative study involving a small, private university in the southeast and its redesign of principal leadership preparation; in total eight participants (four professors and four area principals) took part in this study. Participants were asked to “reflect upon their professional experiences, leadership preparation, local needs of school leaders in the region, and the empirical research they use to inform their professional practices” (Johnson & James, 2018, p. 22). Four themes emerged from the responses of the professors, which included the importance of authentic learning, the implementation of practical application courses, skills building, and partnering with area school districts for better outcomes. The study’s participating principals highlighted the significance of meaningful learning and the input of principals in course design, adding that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to creating effective PPPs (Johnson & James, 2018). Specifically, the principals who took part in this study expressed a desire for relevant learning that meets the needs of their current school and community, having a voice at the table when creating curriculum for principal preparation, and

acknowledgement that while PPPs are helpful, true learning occurs while being in the role (Johnson & James, 2018).

Perceptions of Principal Preparation Programs

The NASSP stated that “many of today’s preparation programs are irrelevant to and inadequate in developing the skills and competencies required for the principalship” (NASSP 2017, p. 3). To alleviate the gap in learning and effective implementation, NASSP/NAESP (2013) has stressed that preparation programs must align clinical components to competencies that are considered to be critical to the role of a principal, such as how to improve instruction, the ability to properly assess and improve teacher quality, and an emphasis on potential programmatic outcomes for student achievement (NASSP, NAESP, 2013).

Williams and Welsh (2017) examined how the capacity of a school and school district to apply for ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) funding could impact opportunities for the professional development of principals. This qualitative, interview-based study captured the perspectives of 10 educational leaders at the state, district and school level who self-identified as having a direct influence on the development and effectiveness of school leaders (Williams & Welsh, 2017). The findings confirmed that “principal preparation programs do not adequately prepare graduates for the complexities and implications of opportunity gaps present in schools and do not serve their graduates well and must undergo reform” (Williams & Welsh, 2017, p. 717). Additionally, the researchers indicated that there is significant room for improvement with respect to PPPs:

District leaders are largely dissatisfied with the quality of principal preparation programs, and many universities believe that their programs have room for improvement. Strong university-district partnerships are essential to high-quality preparation but are far from universal and the course of study at preparation programs does not always reflect principals’ real jobs. (Williams & Welsh, 2017, p. 706)

Williams and Welsh (2017) also noted that ESSA has the potential to widen the economic and social divide existing between districts and schools due to the lack of personnel and funding. While funding is available, “flexibility and autonomy due to a lack of resources” negatively impact underperforming schools with respect to PPP (Williams and Welsh, 2017, p. 701).

In their cross-analysis qualitative study, Parylo and Zepeda (2015) assessed professional learning and principal success within two school districts in Georgia—a large district located in

an urban setting, and a medium-sized, more rural district. The study revealed several factors that are likely to enhance the success of principals and their professional learning experiences (Parylo & Zepeda, 2015). For instance, the presence of a superintendent who acknowledges the alignment of the principal role and student success will likely advocate the use of PPPs for the district's principals. Findings from this study also support the need to appoint a principal from within the district to reduce the learning curve and create immediate buy-in to district policies and practices. Further, Parylo and Zepeda (2015) also acknowledged the importance of building a pipeline of leaders to ensure consistency, as well as creating and delivering relevant professional learning experiences within the district instead of having to rely on local university leader preparation programs. Regardless of location, both districts incorporated professional learning opportunities for their leadership staff (Parylo & Zepeda, 2015).

Davis and Darling-Hammond (2012) conducted a cross-case analysis study of five exemplary university-led PPPs, which were identified as such based on seven effective design elements captured through case descriptions:

- Organization of a program that is aligned to values and has a clear focus on leadership and learning;
- A standards-based curriculum that emphasizes instructional leadership, organizational development, and change management;
- Skilled supervision that includes field-based internships;
- Affording participants opportunities to collaborate and demonstrate teamwork in practice simulations;
- Opportunities to incorporate instructional strategies to link theory and practice;
- Intentional and rigid recruitment and selection process of candidates and faculty;
- Collaboration with schools and districts to support high-quality field-based learning.

The study provided the context for each program, along with key features and outcomes that included participant feedback and placement of participants, coupled with programmatic features they shared—namely, the integration of research and practical experiences and an overarching focus of instructional leadership (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Overall, participants indicated “high levels of confidence and efficacy relating to administrative tasks and working with teachers to promote powerful teaching and learning” during the completion of program requirements (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012, p. 41).

Petzko (2008) claimed that “only a limited amount of research has specifically been asked by new principals to reflect on what preparation was or would have been critical to their initial success” (p. 229); accordingly, graduate programs must not miss the opportunity for former students to provide feedback related to how the program addressed their needs as a new principal. To ascertain the perspectives of new principals, Petzko (2008) carried out a quantitative investigation involving 73 first-, second-, and third-year principals and assistant principals, who were asked to identify the knowledge and skills they deemed to be important to their success as a new school administrator. Using a 4-point Likert scale, the participants rated 18 knowledge and skills domains using two criteria: (a) the degree to which that knowledge and those skills were important to their initial success, and (b) how prepared they felt as fledgling administrators with respect to those 18 factors. In addition, they were asked to provide the level of graduate level preparation they had in each knowledge and skill area (Petzko, 2008). The survey results highlighted the need of principal preparation graduate programs to (a) link pedagogical content to problems of practice, (b) include meaningful internships with skilled mentors, (c) include a curriculum audit to ensure priority areas are addressed and (d) seek active and ongoing feedback from students to ensure that their needs are fully addressed (Petzko, 2008). In addition, a recommendation for a review of district induction programs was also noted as a priority (Petzko, 2008).

Beam et al. (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study involving 159 new and more experienced school leaders who took part in an asynchronous graduate program at a private non-profit institution in Virginia; the goal of the study was to determine their perceptions of the challenges they encountered during the first three years of leadership. More particularly, the study was structured with two specific goals in mind: “(1) to gain an awareness of the challenges and expectations of the recently appointed principal and (2) to compare whether the realities or the perceptions of those realities changed over time with longevity” (Beam et al., 2016, p. 146). Their quantitative survey instrument used a Likert-type scale, while qualitative data was captured via multiple-choice and open-ended questions, as well as focus group interviews.

The resulting quantitative data confirmed that three areas were equally challenging for both newer and experienced principals during their early years in the role: paperwork, parent relations, and student discipline (Beam et al., 2016). Similarly, answers to the open-ended questions produced comparable themes for both cohorts, who noted that politics, bureaucracy,

and credibility were major concerns that impacted their success during the first three years as principal (Beam et al., 2016). Moreover, the qualitative data from the focus group results aligned with the themes of “personal style, faculty relations, policy and legal issues, application of theory to practice, time and task management, and need for support” (Beam et al., 2016, p. 155). Based on findings from this study, however, the overarching theme was the need for increased support for recently appointed principals.

Gentilucci et al. (2013) explored the perspectives of 11 new principals in an attempt to gather first-hand knowledge about the various issues and challenges they must address in performing their range of daily administrative duties. Their qualitative investigation sought to assess the views of new principals regarding their duties as a principal, gain perspectives related to the perceived challenges and rewards of being a first-year principal, and compare how their initial perspectives changed over a period of time as a result of the day-to-day challenges of their positions (Gentilucci et al., 2013).

The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, which focuses on human interactions in specific situations, served as a foundation whereby respondents could speak freely about their perceptions with minimal guidance from the researcher (Gentilucci et al., 2013). This framework, coupled with a noninterventionist approach to data collection in the form of respondent-driven interviews, enabled participants to set the direction of their responses and interaction with the researcher (Gentilucci et al., 2013). The researchers developed questions that would help participants freely share their thoughts and feelings about their experiences, but added one intentionally focused line of questioning about “how administrative preparation programs could be redesigned to prepare principals more effectively for the challenges of their work” (Gentilucci et al., 2013, p. 76). In response, this study’s findings indicate that soft skills such as relationship building, networking, stress management, and “surviving at the center of complex organizational dynamics” (p. 84) should be stressed more than they are in preparation programs, which tend to focus on hard skills.

The authors also confirmed that, as new principals, respondents were “very optimistic about succeeding in their roles” (Gentilucci et al., 2013, p. 79). Moreover, each respondent considered their role as principal to be multifaceted, consisting of motivator, communicator, collaborator and counselor—all geared toward making a difference in the lives of students and staff. In contrast, the researchers listed four key themes that emerged when participants were

asked to share what they considered to be the most challenging aspects of their role: stress, time management, relationships, and support (Gentilucci et al., 2013). While some perceptions tended to be consistent among all 11 respondents (e.g., the presence of stress), some perceptions were more individualized and situation specific.

The Importance of Principal Professional Learning

Coggshall (2015) recommended that the somewhat lengthy definition of professional development included in Section 9101 of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act “could be re-imagined with a suggested new definition of professional development consisting with a focus on continuous performance improvement-of both people and organizations-at all levels” (p. 12). Since the establishment of ESSA in 2015, Learning Forward (2019), the only national professional association that supports professional learning for all educators, advocated for providing a clear and concise definition of professional learning as activities with two overarching goals, as follows:

(A) are an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators . . . with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet the challenging State academic standards; and (B) are sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused (p. 1).

Coggshall (2015) maintained that professional development should be aligned to organizational systems of support rather than to the quality of the principal. She also provided practical examples for two evaluation systems that successfully promoted professional learning: (a) The Teacher Evaluation and Development (TED) System developed under the leadership of New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), and (b) Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Teacher Professional Growth System (TPGS) in Maryland. Although these programs are largely directed at professional training opportunities for teachers, the recommended components of these programs pertain to principal training as well, such as evidence-based standards, multiple measures for assessment, peer assistance and review, and the importance of professional development aligning with performance improvements (Coggshall, 2015). Performance improvement can consist of activities and resources such as taking courses or workshops, while resources can consist of social networks, and an opportunity to collaborate or study and reflect individually (Coggshall, 2015). Finally, Coggshall (2015) asserted that Title

IIA money must be spent to “improve the specific educator practices that help students learn new content and competencies” (p. 6).

In her effort to examine professional development through the lens of ESSA, Combs (2017) compared the ESSA definitions of professional development with her retrospective analysis involving data from 200 school systems in 27 states representing a five-year period. The author confirmed that “80 percent or more of PL [professional learning] falls short of criteria for effective professional development” (Combs, 2017, p. 1). She also listed six strategies for effective professional learning: (a) defining sustained professional learning, (b) defining intensive professional learning, (c) defining collaborative professional learning, (d) defining job-embedded professional learning, (e) defining data-driven professional learning, and (f) defining classroom focused professional learning (Combs, 2017).

Principal Retention and Professional Development

Researchers from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2013) concluded that principals who did not receive professional development were 1.4 times more likely to leave their schools than those who participated in professional development. Fullan (2001) stated that “leading schools through phases of school improvement takes 5 to 7 years, therefore the consistent role of the principal is crucial” (p. 87). As a basic definition, principal turnover occurs when said individual does not return to their position from one year to the next (Rangel, 2018). Goldring and Taie (2014) studied the attrition rate among principals, concluding that about 22% of principals leave the position every year and do not return. “The high turnover rate of educational leaders nationwide points to the complexities, responsibilities, and relentless pressures of the job, and such turnover derails improvement efforts necessary for student learning” (Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, 2015, p. 6).

Similarly, in their report entitled “Principal Shortage,” the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP, 2017) reported an analogous finding:

One in five principals working in schools in the 2011-12 school year left their school by the 2012-13 school year, and the demand for employment of elementary, middle, and high school principals will grow 6 percent nationwide by the year 2022 due to population increases. (p. 2)

In response to this finding and to turn around this disturbing attrition rate, the report provided a number of recommendations for state and federal policymakers, for district leaders, and for

school leaders—including reducing the gap between principal training and practice through competency-oriented PPPs (NAASP, 2017). Specifically, the report recommends delivering “significant and meaningful ongoing coaching and professional development to support the practicing principal’s continuing education in instructional leadership practices that will improve school wide instructional practice and student achievement” (p. 3). Additionally, principal-retention strategies should include professional development and ongoing coaching in an effort to support principals in their role as lifelong learners.

Community of Scholars

George W. Bush Institute

Founded in 2009, the George W. Bush Institute (GWBI) has made it a priority to support leaders through education reform initiatives. Recognizing the important role of the principal to sustain student success, the GWBI has partnered with four school districts in Texas, Virginia, and Utah in an effort to share research that fosters best practices intended to prepare and support principals. In 2016, the George W. Bush Institute implemented its Principal Talent Management, which promotes five standards aligned with research-based competencies that support the recruitment and retention of highly effective principals: preparation, recruitment and selection, professional learning, performance evaluation, and compensation and incentives (GWBI, 2016a).

The George W. Bush Institute (2016a) stated the following about professional learning for principals, “Principal professional learning encompasses policies, programs, and practices that aim to improve current school principals’ leadership and managerial skills. Professional learning (also referred to as professional development) programs typically include activities such as principal coaching and formal coursework” (p. 18). Additionally, the Institute provides three ways whereby professional learning can be delivered: through workplace initiatives, through interaction with others and structured programs (e.g., via evidenced-based PPPs).

The Wallace Foundation

Created with the goal of supporting educational programs through philanthropic initiatives, the Wallace Foundation supports teachers, school libraries, national youth organizations, and most recently school leadership efforts. As a driver of change, the Wallace Foundation has created a number of initiatives to support school principals, such as the Principal

Pipeline Initiative, ESSA Learning Community, the University Principal Preparation Initiative, and the Principal Supervisor Initiative (The Wallace Foundation, 2017).

The University Principal Preparation Initiative “pairs each of seven participating university principal prep programs with three or more school districts that hire its graduates so the university can tailor its training to the needs of those locales” (The Wallace Foundation, 2017, p. 7) According to The Wallace Foundation (2017), not all educational leaders, once they are appointed as a principal, are actually afforded opportunities to take part in targeted, high-quality professional development. While there is a need for professional learning for newly appointed school leaders, professional learning for principals after beyond first few years of service is also important and should not be neglected by district administrators (School Leaders Network, 2014).

The Wallace Foundation is also noted for funding and supporting the SREB Learning-Centered Leadership Program (Fry-Ahearn & Collins, 2016). The creation of this program stemmed from a focus group of principals acknowledged for their exceptional leadership, which had a correlational relationship with increased student achievement (Fry-Ahearn & Collins, 2016). The outcome of this focus group resulted in 13 Critical Success Factors that are now the framework for the SREB focus on improving the leadership preparation and development of future principals (Fry-Ahearn & Collins, 2016).

Ongoing Professional Development for the Principal

The importance of ongoing professional development for principals has been understood and reported for decades. Barth (1982) asserted that traditional approaches to professional development were inadequate for principals due to the fact that programmatic activities tended to be based on assumptions, not on the actual needs of the principal or the needs of the school. With the understanding that professional learning is needed to support principals, school districts have taken steps to hold meetings with principals to support group-based learning and low-quality professional learning (GWBI, 2016a). However, attempts to tie district goals and guide discussions in group settings (e.g., via meetings with principals) do not translate to supporting the individual needs of principals and their respective schools in evidence-based, targeted ways (GWBI, 2016a).

Both the NASSP and NAESP (2013) stress the need for continual high-quality professional learning for principals (NASSP & NAESP, 2013). At the national level, the NASSP

recognizes the need to collaborate in an effort to assist school leaders in surmounting the challenges they face and equip them with the skills and tools needed to transform education going forward (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2018). Similarly, the NAESP acknowledges the expanding role of the principal and the need to provide ongoing support by creating avenues for continual development (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2020).

“A historically common mindset is that principals already have the knowledge they need to be successful when they enter the position” (GWBI, 2016b, p. 5). As reinforced by ESSA mandates, school leaders must be equipped to positively impact teaching and learning through well-structured programmatic activities. Indeed, Coggshall (2015) emphasized the need to invest in ongoing training and self-reflection for school leaders. In a qualitative study conducted by Williams and Welsh (2017), participants expressed concerns related to allotted time to participate, execution of implementation, and lack of inclusivity. Importantly, “participants who work in high-poverty schools suggest that they need a different type of training and a different type of professional development” (Williams & Welsh, 2017, p. 713).

Principals must have opportunities throughout their careers to be trained, developed, and supported in consistent ways that reflect modern, evidence-based standards. Coggshall (2015) reported that in order to intensify the potential impact of school leadership on teaching and learning, evidence points to investing in opportunities for the ongoing training and development of senior school administrators, coupled with the time to reflect on the impact of professional practices and refine them accordingly. As Rowland (2017) stated, “Setting up coordinated, high quality, individualized professional learning requires local and state support in the form of policies, structures, funding, and high-quality, transparent information on effective principal professional development design” (p. 7). Two notably effective principal professional development programs are the National Institute for School Leadership’s (NISL) Executive Development Program and McREL’s Balanced Leadership program (Rowland, 2017). Another program discussed in this literature review is the Recently Appointed Administrators’ Program (RAAP), which is offered through Virginia Tech.

National Institute for School Leadership

The National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) was established to strengthen the skills and knowledge of those in leadership positions and thus promote highly effective

educational institutions (NISL, 2019). Driven by extensive research, NISL prides itself in not only helping to develop the skills of individuals, but also stimulating the effectiveness of schools, districts, and state departments of education in the United States (NISL, 2019). Support for the school leader is guided by the following competencies: (a) the importance of school leadership and leadership development, (b) instructional leadership, (c) organizational leadership, and (d) pedagogical skills (NISL, 2019). While content is important, NISL states that overall delivery of PPPs must incorporate best practices for adult learning; therefore, all professional learning should be delivered through collaborative cohorts, job-embedded experiences, use of simulations, incorporation of 360-degree assessments, and an extended period of study.

NISL’s Executive Development Program addresses the needs of school leaders through a comprehensive curriculum that consists of 12 units with flexible delivery options over 12-15 months (NISL, 2019). Overarching course themes include, vision and goals, teaching and learning, as well as commitment and capacity while sustaining transformation (NISL, 2019). Within the Executive Development Program, NISL has also developed a number of Leadership Institutes that target critical issues facing school leaders, which are intended to facilitate more personalized learning for the school leader based on their strengths and weaknesses and the needs of the school (NISL, 2019). Specifically, these institutes include the College and Career Readiness Institute, the English Language Learners Institute, the Instructional Coaching Institute, the Parent, Family and Community Engagement Institute, and the Students with Disabilities Institute (NISL, 2019).

McREL International’s Balanced Leadership Program

Walters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) reviewed McREL International’s Balanced Leadership Framework, which they indicated is grounded in the belief that “effective leadership means more than simply knowing what to do—it’s knowing when, how, and why to do it” (p. 2). The authors discussed three significant sources of information used to formulate the McREL’s balanced leadership framework: (a) an assessment of quantitative research spanning more than 30 years, (b) an extensive review on theories of educational leadership, and (c) the perspectives of a varied team of educators with many years in school leadership (Walters et al., 2003).

Informed by scholarly research, the stated mission of McREL International is to “help educators flourish by turning research into solutions that transform teaching, learning, and leading” (McREL, 2019). This organization partners with school divisions to address

organizational concerns by developing and making available a variety of personalized platforms such as hands-on-training, consulting, and coaching (McREL, 2019). With a focus on continuous improvement, participants are able to select from nine topics: curriculum standards, assessment, learning supports, instruction, leadership development, instructional technology, human capital management, research and program development, school and system improvement (McREL, 2017).

Although states and districts have autonomy in how Title II funding is used, ESSA has implemented evidence-based requirements to ensure that funds are used with fidelity (Rothman, 2017). Specifically, ESSA defines the term *evidence-based* as an “activity, strategy, or intervention that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes” (Rothman, 2017, p. 5). In his report, Rothman (2017) reviewed the evidenced-based requirements of ESSA and school programs that have met those requirements; he also indicated that the programmatic activities offered through NISL’s Executive Development Program and the various McREL-sponsored institutes provide evidence of increased student achievement.

Recently Appointed Administrators’ Program

The Recently Appointed Administrators’ Program (RAAP) is a residential program designed to “help new principals learn the knowledge, skills, and strategies they need in order to be successful on the job” (Eller, 2008, p. 1). Held every quarter in Roanoke, VA, (about 45 minutes from the Virginia Tech campus) and comprising four 2½ day sessions, the RAAP delivers a variety of educational leadership and learning activities for principals and other senior school administrators who are still early in their career paths (Eller, 2008). The RAAP was established in October 2005 as a collaborative effort involving the Western Virginia Public Education Consortium (WVPEC), Center for Organizational Technological Advancement, (COTA), and the Virginia Tech School of Education to help newly appointed administrators grow their leadership capacities (Harris, 2020). Since its inception, the RAAP has provided support to 16 consecutive cohorts of novice school leaders (640 individuals to date) from 100 school districts; Drs. Wayne Harris and Wayne Tripp, two former Virginia public school superintendents, helped to create the program and continue to serve as coordinators (Harris, 2020).

WVPEC’s mission is to “initiate and nurture systemic, sustainable, and collaborative efforts aimed at the improvement of learning conditions for all students in the WVPEC service area, by providing high-quality staff development conferences throughout the year” (Western Virginia Public Education, 2017, para. 1). WVPEC is comprised of 24 Virginia School divisions, includes a governance board of superintendents, representatives from Radford University and Virginia Tech, as well as regional state legislators. In an effort to support schools within the region, WVPEC offers discounted professional development programs for members, including the Recently Appointed Administrator Program (Western Virginia Public Education, 2017).

Established in 1994 at Virginia Tech, COTA offers four programs grounded in university and community partnerships that support leadership development opportunities, with Virginia Tech faculty serving as instructors. The School Leaders Institute, designed to provide the tools to help educators advance their careers, is one of the four programs that include the Recently Appointed Administrator Program (COTA, 2020). To reflect the university-community partnership, all programs have been offered at the historic Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center in Roanoke, Virginia.

In the late 80s The Hotel Roanoke, which at the time was owned by the Norfolk and Western Railroad, was badly in need of costly renovations. A collaboration between the railroad, the City of Roanoke, and the Virginia Tech Foundation resulted in both the hotel’s restoration and the addition of a conference center (Harris, 2020). In an effort to strengthen the university-community partnership, Bob Herbert, former City Manager of Roanoke and current Senior COTA fellow, was tasked to create the first program that would take place at The Hotel Roanoke. Mr. Herbert then approached Dr. Wayne Harris, then a recently retired superintendent of Roanoke City Public Schools, to submit a program proposal aligned to leadership development at The Hotel Roanoke. Having held a similar program at Harvard University, Dr. Harris collaborated with Dr. Wayne Tripp (retired superintendent for the Salem, VA, school system and former Executive Director of WVPEC), to create an outline and concept paper for a leadership development program (Harris, 2020).

To ensure that the RAAP’s goals would be met, Dr. Tripp formed an advisory group made up of principals and central office personnel able to convey “practitioners’ point of view grounded in a theoretical base” to support beginning administrators employed within smaller school divisions who might be limited in opportunities to engage in professional and leadership

development (Tripp, 2020). Tripp (2020) and others used the Virginia Performance Standards, the ISLLC standards, and the PSEL standards to structure the program, while real-world scenarios were incorporated to help to bring context to the standards and strengthen leadership skills (Tripp, 2020). It should be noted that while the initial concept paper focused on the leadership development of principals, school superintendents shared with program coordinators the need for such development opportunities for all recently appointed administrators, regardless of their title, have an opportunity to attend (Harris, 2020).

Each RAAP session has a themed topic led by practitioners in the field of education, and interactive activities are provided that encourage collaboration and reflection among participants. A range of scholarly educational leadership materials in the form of books and articles are also made available, as well as connections with a mentor (Eller, 2008). The evolution of the RAAP is a result of the feedback provided by superintendents encouraging Dr. Harris and Dr. Tripp to continue to provide the fundamentals of leadership that can support the recently appointed administrator (Harris, 2020). Participants are required to submit formal evaluations after the close of each workshop, which in some cases has resulted in thematic and programmatic adaptations to better support the pedagogical realities on the ground and the challenges that school leaders are facing (Tripp, 2020).

Harris (2020) stated that many recently appointed administrators may be in their first position of authority and are dealing with confusion. However, a connected curriculum guided by themes and real-life scenarios with an opportunity to reflect and discuss the program has proven to be successful for participants (Tripp, 2020). The RAAP's designers and instructional staff understand that unpredictable challenges can emerge that must be dealt with; thus, in addition to curriculum modifications as needed, participants are encouraged to engage with other participants to reduce the sense of isolation and support each other in navigating the challenges of being an inexperienced school leader.

At the request of Drs. Harris and Tripp, a comprehensive program evaluation was conducted by Eller (2008) after the first year of implementation. The evaluation was designed to examine the experiences and perspectives of new principals, with the goal of assisting program coordinators to identify the strengths and limitations of the RAAP. In particular, Eller confirmed that networking, an engaging programmatic design, and activities to support active learning were all viewed by participants as positive aspects of the RAAP. Moreover, the following major

themes emerged as program strengths based on feedback compiled from participant questionnaires: “collegial and networking, guest speakers and presenters-program, learning atmosphere, technical skill development, active learning, socialization and role clarification” (Eller, 2008, p.4).

Feedback from participants regarding programmatic refinements included the following recommendations: “increase informal networking and problem-solving opportunities, encourage more technology use in conjunction with the program, clear presenter guidance and expectations, focus on role clarification and socialization strategies early in the program” (Eller, 2008, p. 6). Additionally, participants noted that for future programs, the RAAP organizers should also considering improving “the reliability of the assessment process” to include an outcome-based program that is transparent to participants, clarity as it relates to the materials provided by presenters, and consistent feedback and evaluation forms (Eller, 2008, p. 6). The final recommendations for strengthening the RAAP included the “early introduction of content related to socialization and role clarification, program organizers ability to support new principals as they navigate application of concepts, opportunity to network in an informal setting, creation of feedback forms that go beyond program logistics and focus on workshop experience (Eller, 2008, p. 7).

Summary

This literature review provided an overview of national standards supporting and guiding the role and efficacy of the recently appointed principal. This chapter also included an examination of the components of principal preparation programs, as well as how they are perceived among educators, and the ways that ongoing professional learning programs support and help to retain the recently appointed principal. The role of the principal can impact every aspect of a school; accordingly, supporting their professional growth and retention is essential for increased student learning outcomes. PPPs that undergo a rigorous evidenced-based accreditation process are essential in supporting the learning and training needs of new school principals. Moreover, there is a need for universities to collaborate with local school districts to create programmatic offerings that enhance the skills and knowledge their area’s school leaders. Indeed, ongoing professional development opportunities have the potential to provide real-time support when challenges arise; thus, funding must be made available to support high quality programming for the support of new principals. With only one comprehensive program

evaluation conducted on the Recently Appointed Administrators' Program, which took place in 2008, the current study was designed to further examine the perceptions of the RAAP and its impact on leadership development using data from recently appointed principals from the 2017, 2018, 2019 cohort years.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter restates the purpose of this study and the two research questions that guided this investigation. This chapter also presents the research design, methodology, and justification. Also included in Chapter 3 is a discussion of the site/sample selection process, data collection procedures, as well as a review of instrument design, validity, and reliability. The chapter concludes with specifics regarding data treatment, data management and data analysis techniques followed by the projected timeline for this study and a summary of the methodology.

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of recently appointed principals who participated in the RAAP, with the goal of determining how the RAAP contributed to their leadership development as recently appointed principals. For this research, a recently appointed principal was defined as someone with three or fewer years of experience in the role of principal. Although the RAAP is open to administrators in various senior leadership roles, the findings from this study are based on data from principals who took part in 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Research Design: Methodology & Justification

Using words (i.e., non-numerical data) as a source of information, qualitative research is primarily exploratory in nature and seeks to reveal the behaviors and perceptions of a particular cohort with regard to a particular area of interest; qualitative researchers seek to understand how people construct their worlds and the meaning they associate with their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, to capture the perceptions of the recently appointed principal, reflective synopses were transcribed, analyzed and coded to identify themes, and a focus group was conducted to confirm how participation impacted the leadership development of participants. This type of basic qualitative research is phenomenological, which corresponds to studying “people’s conscious experience of their life-world” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26). This research design was implemented to reveal participants' understanding of their experiences during their time in the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program (RAAP), and how their experiences impacted their role as a recently appointed principal.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this research study:

RQ1: How did principal participants indicate the RAAP contributed to their role as a principal?

RQ2: What was the perception of principal participants regarding the impact of the RAAP on their leadership development?

Site/Sample Selection

Sample selection for this research study included 35 former participants of the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program (RAAP). A study proposal requesting data from the program was submitted to Dr. Wayne Tripp, Fellow, Virginia Tech Center for Organizational and Technological Advancement and Affiliate Faculty, Virginia Tech Educational Leadership Program, on April 8, 2020. This proposal can be found in Appendix A. An email of approval from Dr. Wayne Tripp to begin data collection was received on April 18, 2020 (see Appendix B).

While the RAAP supports recently appointed administrators, which can include any position in K-12 education labeled as an administrator, the sample selection for this study included only those who entered the program as recently appointed principals. Nonprobability purposeful sampling was used to identify respondents, which is sampling that “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). For this study, secondary data in the form of previously submitted reflective synopses were obtained for 16 of the 35 recently appointed principals who took part in either the 2017, 2018, or 2019 RAAP.

Data Collection Procedures

In September 2019, the researcher completed the Institutional Review Board, IRB, training on Social and Behavioral research with human subjects (see Appendix C). After committee approval, the researcher submitted the IRB Research Protocol and received approval to begin the study on October 19, 2020 (see Appendix D). To ensure that the two research questions could be answered reliably using data derived from the perceptions of respondents and the impact of program participation, the researcher used three data sources: the secondary data in the form of reflective synopses (described in the next paragraph) obtained from participants from

the 2017, 2018, and 2019 cohort years of the RAAP, demographic data, and data from a focus group.

At the conclusion of each workshop, the RAAP participants are asked to reflect on their experiences and record their takeaways in a reflective synopsis submitted at the conclusion of the final workshop session (see Appendix E). These reflective synopses are intended to capture what the participant had seen, heard, and done to make meaning from their experiences during the four workshop sessions (School Leaders Institute, 2020). Participants were asked to record their reflections throughout the program “while the epiphany is fresh” in an effort to reflect their real-time perspectives (School Leaders Institute, 2020, p. 1). Program coordinators stress the importance of focusing on the word *reflective* to guide participants away from listing experiences, and instead to focus on the meaning of their experiences. Thus, the reflective synopsis provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on how they believe taking part in the RAAP impacted their role as a recently appointed administrator. Of particular importance is the following question: “How will you use the knowledge, skills, and dispositions you have acquired, and have they carried over into your daily work?” (School Leaders Institute, 2020, p. 1). In addition to the use of secondary data, the researcher collected demographic data from participants via the deployment of a seven-question survey (see Appendix F), which obtained specifics about age, race, gender identity, current role, and other information. Participants were then invited to participate in a focus group. Table 1 summarizes the data sources according to the two research questions.

In total, 35 participants who took part in the 2017, 2018, and 2019 program years of the RAAP were recently appointed principals. With approval from the RAAP administration, the researcher obtained the names and school divisions of the 35 individuals, and then used Google and the Virginia Department of Education website to confirm email and phone numbers of these former participants in order to access and evaluate their reflective synopses. The researcher initiated communication with all former participants via email using a scripted Participant Recruiter Email (see Appendix G). The email requested the use of the former RAAP participant’s submitted reflective synopsis, as well as asked if they would be willing to take part in a focus group. The Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study form containing the detailed information of the research study was also included in the email (see Appendix H). Participants who failed to respond within six days received a Reminder Email to Prospective

Participants (see Appendix I). The researcher had planned to have a final follow-up in the form of a phone call to prospective participants who had not responded to the initial two forms of communication (see Appendix J); however, the researcher decided against this due to the number of respondents from the first two attempts.

Table 1

Research Questions and Sources of Qualitative Data

Research Question	Sources of Qualitative Data
<i>Research Question 1: How did principal participants indicate the RAAP contributed to their role as a principal?</i>	Reflective synopses from principal participants
<i>Research Question 2: What was the perception of principal participants regarding the impact of the RAAP on their leadership development?</i>	Seven focus group questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What parts of the RAAP professional learning influenced your leadership as a recently appointed principal? Explain how. 2. What evidence can you share that proves a positive and profound impact to your role as a recently appointed principal as a result of your participation in the RAAP? 3. How long do/did you plan to remain in the role of principal and how did participation in the RAAP support your decision? 4. What are your future aspirations and did participation in the RAAP contribute to future plans? Explain how. 5. Give an example of when you had the opportunity in real time to implement an idea or leadership approach learned during your time in the RAAP as a recently appointed principal. 6. How did your participation in the program increase your leadership skills as a principal? 7. Were there portions of the RAAP experience that you felt did not have a profound impact on your leadership development as a recently appointed principal? What were they? What would have made those experiences more impactful?

After confirming a focus group, the researcher chose to solicit additional reflective synopses by eliminating the requirement to participate in a focus group, instead asking prospective participants to complete the survey and grant permission to access their reflective synopses. Additionally, the researcher was aware that due to challenges of educators—and heightened by the influence of a global pandemic—adding additional pressure lacked empathy and would not be appropriate. As noted in the Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study, participants were assured that they could withdraw at any time. Appendix K, the Withdrawal Confirmation Email, was sent to participants who elected to withdraw after completing the demographic survey.

In the initial email, the researcher requested confirmation of participation through submission of a survey to capture demographic information. Participants who completed the survey would have their name included in a random selection to determine if they would be invited to join the focus group. Participants received an invitation from the researcher to participate in a focus group (see Appendix L). The researcher had planned to enter participants who completed the survey in a random selection to determine who would be invited in the focus group; however, due to the response rate the researcher chose to include all willing participants.

Instrument Design, Validity, and Reliability

The researcher used Virginia Tech Qualtrics to create and distribute the Demographic Survey (see Appendix F). Organization of transcriptions allow for easier data manipulation during retrieval and sorting of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher used NVivo qualitative software to assist with coding and confirming common themes from the transcriptions of the reflective synopses and the focus group interview.

Of many strategies for promoting validity and reliability, data triangulation, which is a method enabling the researcher to examine all participant responses from multiple sources for comparison, is the “best-known strategy to shore up the internal validity of a study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 244). To ensure credibility, the researcher used more than one data point in this research study, as well as utilized an instrument with the capability to capture themes from both the primary and secondary data analyzed for this research. The comparison of data “collected through observations from people with different perspectives” will confirm internal validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 245). While there are computer programs that can assist with

assigning codes, it is the responsibility of the researcher to confirm that the collected data align with the codes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.222).

Data Treatment

After receiving approval from 18 respondents to use their reflective synopses, a RAAP coordinator conveyed them via email to the researcher. The researcher used her Virginia Tech email to gather the reflective synopses; note that a Virginia Tech email account is password protected and requires two-way authentication that is specific only to the researcher. The researcher created a folder on her personal laptop to collect all uploaded reflective synopses. The laptop is password protected with the researcher having sole access to the password.

Data from the demographic survey were also captured in a folder on the researcher's personal laptop. The focus group was conducted through a Virginia Tech Zoom link and was recorded, downloaded in a folder on the researcher's password-protected personal laptop, and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The recording was housed under the login of the researcher through access of Virginia Tech OneCampus.

Upon conclusion of the study, data collected will be maintained for three years. During this time period, data will only be available to the researcher and the dissertation chair through Virginia Tech Qualtrics. A locked cabinet with a key in possession of the researcher will contain paper copies of the data up to three years after the study has concluded.

Data Management

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), data management includes three phases: data preparation (e.g., transcribing oral interviews), data identification (the assignment of codes to data segments), and data manipulation (i.e., searching for, or rearranging, pieces of data). For the purpose of this research study, both primary data (the transcribed focus group interview) and secondary data (the reflective synopses) were identified and manipulated. Specifically, during the data-identification phase the researcher assigned codes in NVivo to portions of the reflective synopses and focus group transcriptions. During the final data management phase, data manipulation, the researcher managed the data to ensure that "segments may be searched for, sorted, retrieved and rearranged" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis Techniques

The goal of data analysis in a qualitative study is to make sense of the data that are collected and to “find answers to your research questions” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 203). With the assistance of NVivo, the researcher used coding to analyze the reflective synopses and the focus group transcription; additionally, a comparative method guided the data-analysis process for this investigation. The researcher selected emergent coding a grounded theory methodology in an effort to dismiss any preconceptions or researcher bias. A process of category construction, which involves identifying themes or patterns, was undertaken while analyzing the reflective synopses and the focus group transcription (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Conceptual links between data points assisted in creating categories and guided the analysis of developed codes. The steps listed in Table 2 assisted in creating codes, categories, subcategories and themes.

Table 2

Data Analysis Steps

Step Number	Process
1.	The researcher reviewed all collected reflective synopses to gain context and flow of delivery in the words of respondents.
2.	The researcher reviewed the focus group transcription and edited portions that were incorrectly transcribed.
3.	The researcher imported the reflective synopses and the focus group transcript to NVivo under a separate data/file folder and began creating codes based on content.
4.	The researcher continued to analyze data by using the hierarchy chart function to confirm subcategories and themes.
5.	The research reported themes noting specific coding references of the reflective synopses and focus group data with the findings of the study.

Timeline

In August 2020, the researcher successfully passed the prospectus examination and submitted the IRB application to the Virginia Tech’s Institutional Review Board in September 2020. After one revision, an approval letter was received October 2020. The researcher obtained

the names of the 35 former principal participants of the Virginia School Leadership Recently Appointed Administrator Program who participated in the 2017, 2018, and 2019 cohorts from the Program Coordinator. After receiving consent of participation from subjects, the researcher requested reflective synopses from the Program Coordinator. A date and time were confirmed by the researcher to conduct a focus group on November 30, 2020. The researcher began analyzing data December 2020. Data was analyzed and transcribed Winter 2020.

Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive review of the methodology used to describe the experiences of recently appointed principals who participated in the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program during 2017, 2018 or 2019, as well as how participation impacted their leadership development. A basic qualitative phenomenological design was used to conduct the study. All subjects were recently appointed principals at the time of their participation in the program. In addition to the information obtained from a brief demographic survey, both primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed. Primary data was obtained from a single focus group interview, which was conducted to confirm how participation impacted the leadership development of participants, and secondary data was obtained from reflective synopses, which were completed during the individual's RAAP year experience. Data were transcribed, analyzed, and coded to identify themes. Chapter 4 describes the findings obtained from data analysis, while Chapter 5 explains the study's findings, implications for practice as well as, suggestions for future studies.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of recently appointed principals who participated in the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program and to examine how the RAAP contributed to their leadership development as a principal. Three forms of data were collected and analyzed for this research study: a demographic survey, secondary data in the form of reflective synopses submitted by each subject, and interview data from a focus group consisting of volunteers who were former participants of the RAAP in 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Research Questions

The following research questions directed this qualitative study:

RQ1: How did principal participants indicate the RAAP contributed to their role as a principal?

RQ2: What was the perception of principal participants regarding the impact of the RAAP on their leadership development?

Data Analysis

The data for this study were obtained from three sources: a demographic survey, secondary data from reflective synopses, and transcribed information from a single focus group interview. The researcher received information about all former cohort participants via email from the RAAP's program coordinator, Dr. Wayne Tripp. This information contained first and last names, position held at the time of participation in the RAAP, as well as their place of employment. Using Google to search for former participant contact information, the researcher confirmed contact information for all former principal participants (current place of employment, email address, and phone number). Table 3 provides a breakdown of the program participants who took part in the RAAP in either 2017, 2018, or 2019. As shown in this table, a total of 35 (n=35) individuals with the title of "principal" were RAAP participants during those three program years.

Table 3***Recently Appointed Administrators by RAAP Cohort Year***

Cohort Year	Principal	Assistant Principal	Other
2017	13	26	1
2018	15	20	1
2019	7	22	2
Total	35	68	4

Demographic Survey Results

As documented in Appendix G, the researcher sent an email on November 2, 2020, to all former principals who took part in the RAAP in 2017, 2018, and 2019 inviting them to contribute to this study. If they agreed to do so, they would be taken to the demographic survey as a first step in the data-collection process. The researcher created the demographic survey, which was administered using the online survey tool, Qualtrics. This survey was designed to capture seven mostly employment-specific areas of data, which are reflected in Tables 3-8. Completion of the demographic survey also confirmed one’s willingness to take part in this study, including the use of each respondent’s reflective synopsis, as well as the readiness to participate in a focus group with other former principal participants. There were no notifications of any undeliverable emails due to an inactive email address.

Qualtrics data indicated 10 responses were received from the initial email. A second email was sent on November 7, 2020, which yielded an additional three responses—with one additional response received between the first and second email. One prospective participant emailed the researcher and indicated that they were not comfortable sharing their reflective essay and did not complete the demographic survey. Two participants completed the survey but sent an email to inform the researcher that due to circumstances not shared they would not be able to participate in the focus group. Due to the slow response rate and the potential barrier of time for subjects, the researcher met with advisors to adjust requests for prospective participants by eliminating the focus group requirement and only asking for prospective participants to complete the demographic survey and provide access to their reflective synopses. A final email was sent to prospective participants on November 24, 2020, requesting their reflective synopsis only. This

email yielded an additional four responses. Overall, the demographic survey yielded a 51% response rate, with a total of 18 subjects agreeing to contribute data to this study.

As noted in the Information Sheet, Appendix H, anonymity was guaranteed to potential participants. Accordingly, Q1 of the Demographic Survey (see Appendix F), the request for the first and last names of subjects, was excluded for reporting purposes. Survey item Q2 asked participants to indicate the year in which they were appointed as a first-year principal. Responses to survey item Q2 are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

First Year Appointed as Principal

Year Appointed	Number of Participants
2002	1
2016	2
2017	2
2018	9
2019	4

Survey item Q3 asked participants to indicate their age range at the time of their appointment as a first-year principal. Table 5 captures responses to survey item Q2s.

Table 5

Age Range at Time of Appointment as a First-Year Principal

Age Range	Number of Participants Within Age Range
40-over	8
35-39	4
30-34	5
25-29	1

Survey item Q4 asked participants to identify their racial or ethnic identity. Five identities were provided in the survey as options with a final option of “other” allowing the participant to indicate their preferred racial and ethnic identification. Table 6 captures responses to Q4.

Table 6***Racial and Ethnic Identity of Participants***

Racial or Ethnic Selection	Number of Participants by Identity
Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin	0
American Indian or Native American	0
Black or African American	1
White	17
Other	0

Survey item Q5 asked participants to identify their gender. Three options were provided allowing participants to indicate male, female, or a final option for participants who did not identify as male or female. Responses are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7***Participant's Gender Identity***

Gender Identity	Number of Participants by Identity
Male	6
Female	12
Other	0

Survey item Q6 asked participants to identify their current position. Five position title options were provided including an option outside of education. Table 8 lists participant responses to survey item Q6.

Table 8***Current Position of Participants by Title***

Position Title	Number of Participants by Position Title
Principal	17
Assistant Principal	0
School-Based Employee	1
Central Office Personnel	0
Non-Educator Role	0

Survey item Q7 asked participants how long they had been in their current position. Two options were provided including range of years. Participant responses to survey item Q7 are included in Table 9.

Table 9***Years in Current Position***

Years in Current Position	Number of Participants Per Year
0-5 years	17
5-10 years	1

Survey item Q8 asked participants to confirm if they at the time of the survey they were occupying the same position they had when they had taken part in the RAAP. As shown in Table 10, all but three occupied the same position at the time of the survey.

Table 10***Former and Current Position Confirmation***

Same Position as RAAP Participant	Number of Participants Per Response
Yes	15
No	3

Data compiled from the demographic survey confirmed that although three cohort years were included in data findings (2017, 2018, and 2019), the appointments of first-year principals

varied among subjects. Age range also varied among participants with the largest number, n=8, falling within the range of 40 and over. Racial and ethnic identity among subjects confirmed that 95% of the subjects identified as White, with n=1 subject identifying as Black. Over half of the subjects identified as female (n=12). Regarding the current position of subjects, the majority of participants (n=17) were in the role of a principal at the time of the survey, with one participant in a different role as a school-based employee. A majority of subjects (n=17) reported 0-5 years in their current position, while most (n=15) confirmed that their current position had not changed since taking part in the RAAP.

Reflective Synopses Results

Daily review of the Qualtrics data provided the researcher with the names of those who had responded to the invitation to take part in this study. As noted, the initial email sent out on November 1, 2020, yielded 10 responses with 4 additional responses through November 12, 2020. Due to the low response rate and after confirming a focus group, the researcher chose to solicit additional reflective synopses by eliminating the requirement to participate in a focus group, instead asking prospective participants to complete the survey and grant permission to access their reflective synopses. This action yielded an additional 4 responses. However, correspondence with Dr. Tripp confirmed that the reflective synopses for 3 of the 2017 cohort members were not on file and thus could not be provided. The researcher emailed subjects of the 2017 cohort and inquired about their synopsis and willingness to provide a copy; one of the three subjects responded and shared their synopsis. A total of 16 reflective synopses were captured for this research study.

An analysis of the reflective synopses was intended to provide data responding to Research Question 1: *How did principal participants indicate the RAAP contributed to their role as a principal.* A total of 16 out of 18 reflective synopses were collected for this research study, which corresponds to a response rate of 88% due to the inability to collect two synopses from participants in the 2017 cohort. Table 11 includes the number of synopses by cohort collected and analyzed for this research study.

Table 11***Reflective Synopses Collected and Analyzed***

Cohort Year	Reflective Synopsis
2017	1
2018	10
2019	5

To create codes and confirm themes from the reflective synopses, the researcher imported reflective synopses in NVivo, a qualitative software program. Using the word frequency feature, the researcher set criteria that included a query of only the selected synopses, finding matches that includes stemmed words with a minimum letter count of five. Excluding stop words such as prepositions and conjunctions, a maximum of 100 words was included in the query. Table 12 provides the word frequency by count of 60 or above. Words noted within the same cell of the table indicate a duplicate word count.

Table 12***Word/Term Count by Frequency***

Word or Term	Frequency
School	183
Students	130
Teachers	105
Staff	103
Building/Reflect	89
Principal	85
Experiences	80
First/Learning	76
Administrators	71
Leadership/Leader	65
Workshop	64
Importance/Relationships	60

For the initial data analysis of the reflective synopses, the researcher began open coding to capture initial codes before uploading the synopses in NVivo. The researcher used an inductive process, the gathering of “data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories” to create coding categories and subcategories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.17). Using the hierarchy chart feature, a feature in NVivo that helps to visualize coding patterns, the researcher confirmed categories and subcategories of codes that emerged into four themes. Phrases captured in the reflective synopses are reported by theme. Due to anonymity, each phrase quoted is referred to as “Admin-X,” followed by the corresponding number for each participant from 1-16. The following sections list the four themes that were developed from the reflective synopses and focus group interview, which are supported by participant statements.

Theme: Enhanced Leadership Skills. The following verbatim statements support the first theme that RAAP participation enhanced the leadership abilities of respondents.

- “Lastly in workshop one, I came to the realization that I need a coach” (Admin-2).
- “My coach has been helpful in this experience. I believe my ability to openly share and glean feedback has helped me to more accurately reflect and more effectively face the many challenges, tasks, and expectations of the principalship” (Admin-9).
- “I was cultivated and coached into becoming a better leader than I was before enrolling in the program” (Admin-8).
- “The discussions and experiences shared in workshop #1 really helped me to build the confidence I needed to get through the first few months as a newly appointed principal” (Admin-8).
- “The strategies given were invaluable and can be used across many areas of communicating” (Admin-12).

Theme: Implementation of New Initiatives and Programs. The following verbatim statements support the second theme that RAAP participation added skills to their leadership toolbox that they could use to implement new initiatives and programs.

- “As a result of the data session, I designed a process to track the data...and am piloting this process with one department in my school” (Admin-2).
- “I have learned ways to be a better instructional leader...ways to use data to drive results” (Admin-3).

- “I enjoyed exploring how data can inform decision-making throughout the school, rather than only instructional decision-making” (Admin-9).
- “I designed a process to track the data we are asked to track, but I made it easier to keep up with and easier to evaluate the success of our interventions through data meetings with teachers” (Admin-2).

Theme: Benefits of Self-Reflection. The following verbatim statements support the third theme that RAAP participation empowered them to take time to self-reflect on their mission and strategies for addressing the challenges of the job.

- “The power and importance of reflection would be the single most critical concept that I have taken away from this workshop series” (Admin-10).
- “I spend most of my time as a Principal just reacting to situations. It has been nice to have time to truly reflect on how I handle difficult situations and how others handle them” (Admin-4).
- “I need to remember who I was before I became an administrator and how that shapes and influences who I am as an administrator. I definitely think I can do a better job of reflecting on a personal level” (Admin-15).

Theme: Value of Networking and Building Collegial Relationships. The following verbatim statements support the fourth theme that RAAP participation was essential for creating new professional networks and connecting with others to share leadership strategies.

- “These workshops are not just about activities; they are about getting to know people and yourself through the activities” (Admin-2).
- “This experience and the ability to connect with other first year administrators has been invaluable to me” (Admin-13).
- “Networking has helped me bounce ideas and made me a better leader because it made me aware of what other people were doing and also brought awareness that we have common struggles in this position” (Admin-4).
- “Diverse voices and experiences of the presenters showed the numerous approaches that can be used to provide leadership” (Admin-5).

Table 13 captures the four themes as well as the frequency of the direct coding reference. The direct coding reference indicates the frequency of the code reference captured in the reflective synopses.

Table 13

Themes from the Reflective Synopses

Themes	Direct Coding Reference
Enhanced Leadership Skills	13
Importance of having a coach/mentor	11
Power of effective communication	9
Increased confidence to make challenging decisions	8
Implementation of New Initiatives and Programs	23
The use of data to guide instruction	16
Benefits of Self-Reflection	13
Acknowledgement of vulnerability	9
Importance of self-care and acquiring work/life balance	12
Value of Networking and Building Collegial Relationships	16
Exposure to experienced and effective educational leaders	10

Focus Group Results

While a total of eighteen (n=18) subjects indicated a willingness to participate, a total of six (n=6) subjects confirmed their participation in the focus group. Due to restriction associated with the COVID-19 pandemic—coupled with the sometimes-distant location of those six individuals, the focus group was held virtually using the Virginia Tech Zoom account. The researcher set up the account to include a recording option with transcription to assist with analyzing data. To ensure validity of the transcription, the researcher compared the audio recording with the transcription prior to analyzing and capturing codes and themes associated with the participant responses. The seven questions asked during the single focus group session conducted for this investigation (the results of which are discussed in the following sections), were designed to answer Research Question 2: *What was the perception of principal participants regarding the impact of the RAAP on their leadership development.* To begin the session, the

researcher provided a brief summary of the research study and then posed the seven questions. In total, the focus group lasted 31 minutes. Due to anonymity, for reporting purposes each participant quoted is referred to as “RAAP-X,” followed by the corresponding number for each participant from 1 to 6.

Results for Focus Group Question 1. Focus Group Question 1: *What parts of the RAAP professional learning influenced your leadership as a recently appointed principal? Explain how.* Participants agreed that, on balance, taking part in the RAAP positively influenced their leadership as a recently appointed principal. One participant provided context, stating the following:

Like any principal, I’ve struggled with this balance for a long time and I think the program did help me look at some things I’m doing and try to find balance between work and home...I thought this was a very good part of the conference that really registered with me. (RAAP-3, 130)

Participants also referenced the RAAP session addressing work-life balance as being particularly important as a result of the unforeseen circumstances brought about by the pandemic.

Participant, (RAAP-5, 192), noted that prior to the pandemic, "we already tried to figure out how to find balance between work and home and now we are working from home for three to four months and we are still trying to figure out a balance." Several respondents also singled out the importance of informal opportunities to connect and network. RAAP-5 referenced the cohort model of the program provided opportunities for informal connections and an opportunity to “meet with people that you don’t really have a chance to develop relationships and have honest and deep conversations.” One participant shared that the time was “a great way for us to make connections within our division” alluding to the need for elementary and secondary to share and learn from each other whereas in their division they do not always have this opportunity (RAAP-4, 136).

Results for Focus Group Question 2. Focus Group Question 2: *What evidence can you share that proves a positive and profound impact to your role as a recently appointed principal as a result of your participation in the RAAP?* Based on responses from the six focus group subjects, the theme of “preparedness” as a result of their participation in the RAAP had a positive and profound impact on their role as a recently appointed principal. Scenario-based sessions provided “philosophies or guidelines that you can apply to any situation and law”

(RAAP-5, 188). Participants indicated that they were better equipped with the tools shared through workshops to pivot as needed in order to lead successfully. As one participant stated, “Nobody expected to apply these things to a pandemic situation, but I do feel as though it prepared me for something as crazy as 2020” (RAAP-5, 197). Participants agreed that a particular scenario session focused on communication helped them come up with talking points as they prepare for faculty meetings and communicating with families prior to and especially during the pandemic. “Definitely think there’s folks that I can reach out to struggling, you know, just being honest with my own mental health right now and just it’s okay to not be okay” (RAAP-4, 181).

Another participant noted a positive and profound impact gained through participation was confirmation from experienced leaders that “you are not going to know everything that you come up against and it’s okay – you don’t have to be an expert” (RAAP-2, 1111). Participant, RAAP-6, concurred stating that this confirmation gave them confidence.

Results for Focus Group Question 3. Focus Group Question 3: *How long do/did you plan to remain in the role of principal and how did participation in the RAAP support your decision?* Participants noted that becoming a principal was not an initial goal and that the program did not support their decision to remain in the role as a principal. (RAAP-4, 184), stated, “I have no desire to leave it yet...I also wasn’t one of those people that said I really want to be a principal when I grow up...it just happened that way.” Another participant added, “the institution prepared me for something as crazy as 2020, but I don’t know that I never planned to be a principal in the first place” (RAAP-5, 199). However, RAAP-5 mentioned that the transparency of the program coordinators “made the task of being a principal much less daunting” because of their passion and ability to navigate through challenging times as a principal.

Results for Focus Group Question 4. Focus Group Question 4: *What are your future aspirations and did participation in the RAAP contribute to future plans? Explain how.* While the majority of participants noted that participation did not contribute to future plans due to their prior employment in central office roles, there was a reference to exposure and insight to roles outside of the principalship that proved to be helpful. RAAP-1, stated the program provided the opportunity to hear of other roles within education, as well as addressed perspectives and options that they might not have considered had it not been for program participation. One participant expressed the desire to continue moving forward landing in a central office position “the

program helped because you're able to hear people talk about what jobs they're doing and what experiences they had at different levels" (RAAP-1, 1138).

Due to prior experiences at the division level, two participants indicated their future aspirations were to remain in the principalship.

My first chance to be an administrator was actually in central office and I realized very early on that I didn't go into administration to not work in a school based job. I really enjoyed working with kids...so I have no aspirations to move beyond the principalship (RAAP-2, 1149).

Yeah it really didn't have an impact on me either. I'm comfortable with what I am doing now and have no aspirations to leave. I've been in central office before as well and I miss the kids. I am happy where I am and I have no aspirations beyond what I am doing, I love where I am and what I am doing...I am perfectly content (RAAP-3, 1152).

Results for Focus Group Question 5. Focus Group Question 5: *Give an example of when you had the opportunity in real time to implement an idea or leadership approach learned during your time in the RAAP as a recently appointed principal.* As noted by a focus group participant, the RAAP session on *Success is in the Data* provided participants with specific strategies for how to analyze, assess and measure outcomes as well as how to provide feedback to teachers during the evaluation process. The opportunity to gain knowledge, collaborate, and discuss ways to organize the model to fully implement at the building level "provided a good perspective and a different lens to apply and use data within a school" (RAAP-1, 151).

Another participant referenced the need to shift the culture and climate as a newly appointed principal, adding how an informal networking opportunity during RAAP provided guidance on how to create and implement a Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS). Specifically, this individual indicated that RAAP gave them to opportunity to hear the perspectives of colleagues in varying divisions and educational levels, which later assisted them in implementing the PBIS program: "I gleaned information from at least three people in the workshop throughout the course of that year to implement a big change at my school" (RAAP-3, 157). Currently in Year Two, this participant related the successful implementation of Tier One and Tier Two supports for the PBIS program indicating, "We were one of three schools that implemented with fidelity Tier One supports, now we've moved up to a higher level of Tier two support with PBIS" (RAAP-3, 159).

Results for Focus Group Question 6. Focus Group Question 6: *How did your participation in the program increase your leadership skills as a principal?* RAAP-2 spoke about the development process he experienced as a RAAP participant: “I was able to hone into my leadership skills because you were forced to think about it...it was confirmation that you don’t have to be an expert in this right away” (I110). Due to the evolving role of the principalship, the ability to step away from the job and take time to reflect and learn provided a much-needed opportunity for some to reflect on their leadership skills and how to better implement those skills. When referencing the demands of the role, a participant stated,

A lot of times you were barely keeping afloat and to have this little period that you were able to get away to get new ideas and talk to somebody provided encouragement and gives you a chance to reflect and grow and to have those moments to really think about what decisions you’ve been making (RAAP-1, I124).

Another participant noted the ability to attend a workshop, learn a skill, apply it and return to debrief was helpful. “While it was unfortunate to leave the building, the arrangement allowed you to implement and apply what you have learned, return and debrief with the same people (RAAP-5, I182).

An increase in confidence was also referenced in the context of the propensity for less-skilled principals to question themselves when making decisions made as a principal and the opportunity to reach out to others for advice: “Being a principal can be a lonely job and hearing that other people are having struggles that I have gave me more confidence” (RAAP 3, I118).

Results for Focus Group Question 7. Focus Group Question 7: *Were there portions of the RAAP experience that you felt did not have a profound impact on your leadership development as a recently appointed principal? What were they? What would have made those experiences more impactful?* Participants were unable to easily identify aspects of the RAAP that they considered to be superfluous. As stated by RAAP-4, “There was something positive from every presenter and from every session we went to, so I can’t think of anything” (I163). One reference that was consistent among the group was the book selection provided by the program was helpful for subsequent discussions and assignments: “It was a good springboard for discussions and gave talking points, but I think a lot of different books could have done that” (RAAP-5, I191).

Using NVivo, the researcher imported the qualitative data from the transcript obtained from the focus group. A query run through NVivo noted coding references that identified five prominent themes. Table 14 captures the five themes as well as the frequency of the coding reference.

Table 14
Focus Group Coding References

Themes	Coding Reference
Implementation of New Initiatives and Programs	11
Value of Networking and Building Collegial Relationships	10
Importance of Acquiring Work/Life Balance	4
Increased Confidence in Abilities	4
Exposure to experienced and effective educational leaders	3

Summary

Data from three sources (the demographic survey, reflective synopses, and a focus group interview) were collected to answer this study’s two research questions:

RQ1: How did principal participants indicate the RAAP contributed to their role as a principal?

RQ2: What was the perception of principal participants regarding the impact of the RAAP on their leadership development?

The analysis of the reflective synopses helped to identify four themes associated with taking part in the RAAP, which are listed in order of importance: enhanced leadership skills, implementation of new initiatives and programs, benefits of self-reflection, the value of networking and building collegial relationships. Thus, the former principal participants who contributed to this study considered leadership development as the primary factor enhancing their efficacy. Leadership also emerged in the word frequency query with a count of 65.

During the focus group, subjects discussed the impact of the RAAP on their leadership development, with five prominent themes revealed: Implementation of New Initiatives and Programs, Value of Networking and Building Collegial Relationships, Importance of Acquiring Work/Life Balance, Increased Confidence in Abilities and Exposure to Experienced and

Effective Educational Leaders. These themes mirror those captured in the reflective synopses. While the synopses provided by those who participated in the focus group were used for the study, the frequency of coding references were not consistent in the analysis of the synopses and focus group data. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, a discussion of results, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5

Findings And Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions and experiences of recently appointed principals who participated in the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program and to examine how the RAAP contributed to their leadership development as a principal. This study was conducted using a basic qualitative phenomenological design. Data analyzed for this study consisted of primary data in the form of a focus group involving former participants of the RAAP, and secondary data in the form of reflective synopses completed during their particular program year (2017, 2018, or 2019).

Research Questions

The following research questions directed this qualitative study:

RQ1: How did principal participants indicate the RAAP contributed to their role as a principal?

RQ2: What was the perception of principal participants regarding the impact of the RAAP on their leadership development?

Summary of Findings

According to the data presented in Chapter Four, this study's findings indicate that each principal's participation in the RAAP contributed to their role as a recently appointed principal, and they perceived their participation in the RAAP impacted their leadership development in positive ways. Data analysis from the reflective synopses and a singular focus group support the findings for this chapter. Four major findings (with occasional overlap in thematic content) are discussed in the following sections, which are organized by the research question and according to the themes that resulted from a thorough analysis of both data sources. The findings are supported by participant statements. Implications for practice based on the findings are also included in this chapter.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1 Findings

Finding One: Participants indicated that participation in the RAAP informed them of the need for self-reflection as a principal and brought awareness of self-care and balance of work and life outside of work. Respondents noted the importance of self-reflection as a way to examine who they are and who they wish to become as effective leaders. As indicated in Table 13, reflection was as a theme with 13 direct coding references captured in the reflective synopses of seven respondents with multiple references made by three respondents. Balance, referring to the importance of work-life balance as an administrator—of which self-care figured prominently—was confirmed as a subcategory; specifically, it was referenced in 12 statements in the reflective synopses. The data provided in Table 14 also support the subcategory of balance, with four references made by three focus group participants.

The importance of reflection was captured in the reflective synopses, as well as in the responses of focus group participants.

The power and importance of reflection would be the single most critical concept that I have taken away from this workshop series. I have come to rely on reflection and its power to better navigate through the impact that my choices as a leader will have on the school community as a whole. (Admin-10)

Similarly, another respondent in their reflective synopsis noted the benefit of taking the time for reflection and how they respond to situations: “I spend most of my time as a Principal just reacting to situations. It has been nice to have time to truly reflect on how I handle difficult situations and how others handle them” (Admin-4). A focus group respondent referenced the first year as a “wave” and noted that the workshops provided an opportunity to “get away, get new ideas and talk to somebody as well as a chance to reflect, grow and have those moments to really think about what decisions you’ve been making and the impact of those decisions” (RAAP-1, /125).

Respondents also expressed the challenges associated with the role of principal and how opportunities provided during their time in the RAAP allowed them to reflect and acknowledge their vulnerability:

At the very start of this experience I learned that the feelings I have been having the past 16 months months...feelings of confusion, isolation, fear...are not abnormal. I have been

validated in that I am not in this alone and that my feelings are part of the path that I have taken in leadership. (Admin-3)

Admin-15 also wrote about self-reflection:

I need to remember who I was before I became an administrator and how that shapes and influences who I am as an administrator. I definitely think I can do a better job of reflecting on a personal level. As I proceed, I plan to write in my journal at the end of each day.

Several respondents in their reflective synopses also addressed feelings of loneliness and isolation in the role of the principalship:

At the very start of this experience I learned that the feelings I have been having the past 16 months . . . feelings of confusion, isolation, fear . . . are not abnormal. I have been validated in that I am not in this alone and that my feelings are part of the path that I have taken in leadership” (Admin-3).

Another respondent shared a similar sentiment: “I felt as if I was on an isolated island with no support or help in sight. This program helped me realize that being an administrator does not mean I am on this journey alone” (Admin-8).

Respondents spoke about the importance of self-care and balance in their reflective synopses and during the focus group. One respondent described the frustration of realizing the lack of balance in their life:

Session 4 on balance was the hardest session for me. I know I’m not currently balanced and there were many times throughout the session I could have broken down into tears because of how much I felt my balance was off. (Admin-7)

Coordinators modeled self-reflection through transparency about balance which resonated with one respondent:

Hearing the real-life experiences of Drs. Tripp, Richardson, and Harris highlighted for me that work can bring joy, but should never become the primary source of joy. The final workshop has helped me recognize this need to rebalance many aspects of my life as this first year as a Principal begins to wind down. (Admin-16)

Coggs (2015) emphasized the need to invest in ongoing training and self-reflection for school leaders. Performance improvements can result from activities and resources such as taking courses or workshops, seeking out and engaging social networks, identifying

opportunities to collaborate or study with others, and making time to reflect individually. Coggshall (2015) also reported that in order to intensify the potential impact of school leadership on teaching and learning, evidence points to investing in opportunities for the ongoing training and development of senior school administrators, coupled with the time to reflect on the impact of professional practices and refine them accordingly.

Finding Two: Participants indicated that through participating in the RAAP, they found value networking and building collegial relationships to overcome challenges as a recently appointed principal. As stated in the reflective synopses and echoed in the focus group, respondents noted that building relationships and networking contributed to their role as a principal and had a significant impact on their leadership development. Table 13 indicates a total of 16 direct coding references captured in 10 reflective synopses. Four respondents had multiple references within their synopsis. A subcategory of exposure was confirmed as evidenced in 10 statements from eight respondents regarding the impact of exposure gained from experienced and effective educational leaders during the workshops. These findings are mirrored in Table 14 with 10 references aligned to the value of building relationships and networking made by four focus group participants. Additionally, the impact of exposure gained from experienced and effective educational leaders are noted in Table 14 with three coding references from the focus group interview.

Most respondents indicated the importance of experiences based on the relationships formed and networking opportunities that resulted from participating in the RAAP. “These workshops are not just about activities, they are about getting to know people and yourself through the activities” (Admin-2). Another respondent stated, “This experience and the ability to connect with other first year administrators has been invaluable to me” (Admin-13). One respondent spoke about ongoing professional connections beyond the RAAP: “I strongly feel that the partnerships and friendships I have created will be maintained well after the cohort ends, as we resource with each other and shape the education futures of our students and districts” (Admin-5).

Focus group participants also shared that building relationships and networking opportunities had impacted their leadership development during their time as a RAAP participant. “Networking has helped me bounce ideas and made me a better leader because it made me aware of what other people were doing and also brought awareness that we have

common struggles in this position” (Admin-4). Similarly, another participant summarized the importance of the professional relationships they formed during the RAAP: “It’s helpful to know I can use those I’ve met as a resource” (Admin-1).

Other respondents noted the significance of being able to engage with experienced and effective educational leaders. As Admin-9 stated, “The greatest benefits of this program have been the sharing of experiences and ideas that has occurred. Dr. Richardson and Dr. Harris have openly shared their experiences both good and challenging.” Another respondent noted in their reflective synopsis that “diverse voices and experiences of the presenters showed the numerous approaches that can be used to provide leadership” (Admin-5). A focus group participant concurred, stating, “What the program did, especially with Sharon and Wayne was showing sort of like it’s possible.” Thus, the RAAP coordinators who shared their experiences and how they worked through challenges in various ways clearly impacted program participants, who may similarly pass that knowledge on to the next generation of leaders.

A qualitative investigation conducted by Gentilucci et al. (2013), indicated that soft skills such as relationship building, networking, stress management as well managing the complexities of a school should be stressed more than they are in preparation programs which tend to focus on hard skills.

Walters et al. (2003) discussed three significant sources of information used to formulate the McREL’s balanced leadership framework: (a) an assessment of quantitative research spanning more than 30 years, (b) an extensive review on theories of educational leadership, and (c) the perspectives of a varied team of educators with many years in school leadership.

Research Question 2 Findings

Finding Three: Participants indicated that participation in the RAAP strengthened their leadership skills and increased their confidence. The data presented in Table 13 confirm enhanced leadership skills to be a prominent theme of the reflective synopses. In total, 8 respondents referred to leadership development in 13 statements within their reflective synopses. In addition, direct coding reference revealed three subcategories under the umbrella of strengthening of leadership skills, as reflected in 28 statements obtained from the reflective synopses: (a) the importance of a coach/mentor with 11 references, (b) the impact of effective communication with 9 references, and (c) the increase of confidence with 8 references.

Several respondents noted the importance of engaging with a coach or mentor with more advanced skills. As Admin-2 noted, “Lastly in workshop one, I came to the realization that I need a coach.” Similarly, Admin-9 stated that “My coach has been helpful in this experience. I believe my ability to openly share and glean feedback has helped me to more accurately reflect and more effectively face the many challenges, tasks, and expectations of the principalship.” Another respondent spoke about this aspect of the RAAP in the following way: “I was cultivated and coached into becoming a better leader than I was before enrolling in the program” (Admin-8).

Respondents detailed how the RAAP workshop participation enhanced their communication skills, which they indicated would be applicable in various settings and circumstances. As one respondent noted, “The strategies given were invaluable and can be used across many areas of communicating” (Admin-12). Another respondent shared that they felt more capable as a result of participating in the discussions in the workshop:

I have gained the courage to be able to professionally engage in those difficult discussions with faculty members. The discussions and experiences shared in workshop #1 really helped me to build the confidence I needed to get through the first few months as a newly appointed principal (Admin-8).

Similarly, a focus group participant spoke about leadership and confidence the following in terms of preparing for future challenges: “I was able to hone in on my leadership skills because you were forced to think about it, you’re forced to think about what you do in certain situations—how you behave” (RAAP-2, /110).

A shift in communication style and an awareness of effective listening was also captured in one reflective synopsis: “Learning to be an aggressive and active listener in order to hear what others are truly saying and being able to craft solutions to help address those concerns and provide solutions allow for more trust to be developed and extended” (Admin-10). Another focus group member also spoke about the transferability of communication skills to various settings; specifically, this individual noted that while a communication workshop session was aimed to support participants as they spoke to the news media, skills learned were easily transferrable to “coming up with talking points for faculty meetings and when meeting with families” (Admin-6).

Beam et al. (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study to determine how school leaders perceived the challenges they faced during their first three years of leadership. Based on their findings, the authors stressed the need for increased support for recently appointed principals. Similarly, “Principal Shortage,” a report from the National Association of Secondary School Principals, recommends delivering “significant and meaningful ongoing coaching and professional development to support the practicing principal’s continuing education in instructional leadership practices that will improve school wide instructional practice and student achievement” (NASSP, 2017, p. 3). Additionally, principal-retention strategies should include professional development and ongoing coaching in an effort to support principals in their role as lifelong learners.

PSEL Standards 7 and 8 outline the responsibility of an effective leader to communicate to the faculty and staff, as well as to families and the school community (NPBEA, 2015). As such, “The nature and qualities of work articulated in the PSEL Standards serve as a foundation for high-quality professional development opportunities so that educational leaders can continually develop and refine their abilities to excel at their work” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 7).

Finding Four: Participants indicated that participation in the RAAP increased their knowledge and ability to create actionable steps to support and implement new initiatives and programs in their schools. Respondents confirmed their ability to apply skills learned at the workshops to support new initiatives and programs at their schools. Implementation of new initiatives and programs was confirmed as a theme noted as a direct coding reference from the reflective synopses (see Table 13), and from the focus group interview (see Table 14). In total, 12 respondents noted the acquisition of implementation skills in 23 statements in their reflective synopses. A subcategory of the implementation of data as an instructional leader was noted in 16 statements in 11 reflective synopses. Moreover, 11 references were confirmed in the focus group interview with four participants providing context to implementation of new initiatives and programs. Below are quotes supporting this finding from the reflective synopses and the focus group.

Several focus group participants spoke about the ability to apply and implement skills that would support unexpected challenges of the principalship through workshop participation—and in particular via the use of scenarios simulating a range of likely challenges associated with the principalship. One focus group member noted the successful implementation of PBIS after

collaborating with participants in the RAAP program (RAAP-3, 159). Another focus group member noted that the scenarios provided guidelines “that you can apply to any situation” (RAAP-5, 197).

One particular quote resonated with three respondents, as documented in their reflective synopses; specifically, Coordinator Dr. Sharon Richardson stated that *data is a flashlight not a hammer*. One respondent responded to that assertion in the following way: “This registered with me because I have often been concerned with how I present data to teachers” (Admin-4).

Another respondent provided a more detailed reflection about data:

As a result of the data session, I designed a process to track the data we are asked to track, but made it easier to evaluate the success of our through data meetings with teachers – I am currently piloting this process with one department in my school.
(Admin-2)

In their reflective synopses, three respondents expressed a new perspective on the use of data in terms of their impact as instructional leaders: “I have learned ways to be a better instructional leader...ways to build capacity among my staff...ways to use data to drive results” (Admin-3). “I enjoyed exploring how data can inform decision-making throughout the school, rather than only instructional decision-making” (Admin-9). “As a result of this meeting, I designed a process to track the data we are asked to track, but I made it easier to keep up with and easier to evaluate the success of our interventions through data meetings with teachers” (Admin 2).

Similarly, to focus group participants reflected on the usefulness and impact of the data workshop, which they tied to aspects of their leadership development: “The data presentation provided a good perspective and a different lens to apply data and use it within the school” (Admin-5). As a result of closing due to the pandemic, a respondent noted:

The first thing we did when we shut down was started to figure out, which kids have the internet and which ones do not. Nobody expected to apply these things to a pandemic, but I do feel as though the data session prepared me (Admin-6).

In support of the second major finding from this study (and its subcategories), Combs (2017) confirmed six analogous strategies for effective professional learning: (a) defining sustained professional learning, (b) defining intensive professional learning, (c) defining collaborative professional learning, (d) defining job-embedded professional learning, (e) defining data-driven professional learning, and (f) defining classroom focused professional learning.

Coggshall (2015) also emphasized the need to invest in ongoing training and self-reflection for school leaders. While content is important, NISL (2019) states that to meet the needs of adult learners, all professional learning should be delivered through collaborative cohorts, job-embedded experiences, use of simulations, incorporation of 360-degree assessments, and an extended period of study.

The need for instructional leaders to capture hard data and know how to use it effectively was expressed in both the reflective synopses, as well as in the focus group transcript. Similarly, in order to empower recently appointed principals, NASSP/NAESP (2013) has stressed that preparation programs must align clinical components to competencies that are considered to be critical to the role of a principal, such as how to improve instruction, the ability to properly assess and improve teacher quality, and an emphasis on potential programmatic outcomes for student achievement.

Implications for Practice

The results from this qualitative study reinforce the importance of ongoing leadership development training and professional learning experiences beyond principal preparation programs for the recently appointed principal. Accordingly, five implications for practice are suggested, which dovetail with the findings generated from an analysis of the primary and secondary data.

Implication One: School divisions should consider incorporating formalized opportunities for principals to reflect on the impact of their leadership to ensure there is an opportunity to make the necessary adjustments to meet the needs of the school and school community. Aligned with Finding One, reflective synopses of 44% respondents captured 13 direct coding references related to the importance of reflection as a way to examine who they are as effective leaders. This theme of the benefits of self-reflection is supported by research noted in the literature review which emphasized the need for principals to make time to reflect individually as well as on the impact of professional practices (Coggshall, 2015).

Implication Two: School divisions should consider creating supports for principals to achieve work-life balance. This is a second recommendation for practice associated with Finding One. The importance of self-care and acquiring work-life balance was referenced in 12 statements by 44% of respondents in the reflective synopses. Additionally, 50% of focus group participants made references to the gaining awareness to work-life balance as participants of the

RAAP. Research indicates the high turnover rate of principals are a result of the complexities and pressures of the job (PSEL, 2015). To meet this challenge, school divisions have the opportunity to provide strategies to principals to create work-life balance to meet the demands of the role which has the potential to impact retention.

Implication Three: School divisions should consider sending recently appointed principals to the RAAP so that they can develop a support network and professional relationships that will help them meet the challenges of the principalship. This third recommendation for practice is associated with critical importance of interacting with other professionals to share information and provide mutual support and is associated with Finding Two. Reflective synopses of 63% of respondents indicated the value of networking and building collegial relationships to overcome challenges as a recently appointed principal. Focus group participants concurred with 10 references of the value of networking made by 67% of participants. As noted in a qualitative study by Gentilucci et. al (2013), perspectives from new principals indicated the need for soft skills such as networking and relationship building to meet the various issues and challenges of the principalship.

Implication Four: School divisions should consider sending recently appointed principals to the RAAP to strengthen leadership skills as they transition to the principalship. This implication is associated with Finding Three. Reflective synopses captured 13 statements made by 50% of respondents referencing the theme of enhanced leadership skills. To ensure school principals are equipped to transition to the role of the principalship, school divisions should consider providing opportunities for continued education and support through professional development and coaching to develop life-long learners and practitioners.

Implication Five: Principals involved in either planning and/or carrying out initiatives and programs should attend the RAAP to better equip them with the tools and skills needed to ensure success. Finding Four of this study revealed a 75% of respondents indicated the acquisition of implementation skills in their reflective synopses. In addition, 66% participants confirmed their participation in the RAAP provided context to the implementation of new initiatives and programs in their schools.

School divisions are called upon to implement new initiatives and programs fairly regularly. Research has shown the need for ongoing training that supports principals,

instructional leaders, through effective professional learning that include job-embedded experiences and simulations that are easily transferrable (Combs, 2017)

Suggestions for Future Studies

As indicated in this study, the RAAP is designed to support and assist a range of less experienced educational administrators as they grow into their respective roles—not just newer principals. The data included in Table 3 indicate that among the three examined cohort years, 35 principals contributed data to this study in comparison to 68 assistant principals. Thus, there was a nearly two-to-one preponderance of assistant principals who took part in this study compared to principals. However, the data-based findings were not segregated by position. Thus, a follow-up study could examine the two roles separately to determine any differences in programmatic impact.

A future study could be designed to determine how school districts are supporting recently appointed principals in comparison to more formalized programs such as the RAAP. A corollary recommendation for a future study (either mixed-methods or qualitative) would be to compare the educational outcomes for schools led by administrators who had engaged in formalized professional training opportunities compared to those who had not engaged in either district-level or RAAP-like professional learning experiences.

Another recommendation for a future study would be to look at findings based on demographic representation. For instance, note that in Table 6 there was one non-white respondent. A study comparing the perspectives of the impact of the program as it relates to the perspective and experiences of minority participants compared with non-minority participants could provide valuable insights to the varying needs of recently appointed administrators.

Conclusion and Personal Reflections

This qualitative study examined the experiences and perceptions of recently appointed principals who participated in the Virginia School Leaders Recently Appointed Administrator Program, and the impact the program had on their leadership development. Fullan (2014) stated that the role of the principal has become increasingly complex. Although the professional journey of a principal begins with the successful completion of requirements in a state-accredited principal preparation program (Yoder et al., 2014), opportunities for additional learning experiences should be ongoing. While PSEL standards were established to serve as the

framework to effective leadership, NELP standards focus on the mastery of recently appointed district leaders after completing requirements in a principal preparation program (NELP, 2018). PPPs are certainly essential in equipping new principals with the basic tools and credentialing needed to lead their schools, but the complexity of the role and evolving educational standards call for high-quality ongoing professional development to support the leadership development of principals (NASSP & NAESP, 2013).

Data spanning over three years in the form of 16 reflective synopses written by respondents in 2017, 2018, and 2019, coupled with a single focus group interview conducted in 2020, confirmed how participation in the RAAP contributed to their self-reported leadership development. The findings detailed herein confirm that taking part in the RAAP contributed to their role as a principal in four ways: (a) drawing awareness to the benefits of self-reflection as a leader and the importance of self-care and balance as a principal, (b) the value of networking and building collegial relationships to appropriately meet and overcome challenges as a recently appointed principal, (c) strengthening their leadership skills and increasing their confidence, and (d) increasing their knowledge and ability to create actionable steps to support and implement new initiatives and programs in their schools. These findings were consistent in both the reflective synopses as well as the focus group.

In terms of the methodological approach for this investigation, my initial goal was to gather 30 reflective synopses from the 35 principal participants and conduct two focus groups. This goal, however, proved to be more challenging than expected, necessitating the analysis of data from fewer respondents who were willing to participate. It should be noted that I chose not to include a response in the demographic survey that provided respondents an opportunity to share why they chose not to participate. Thus, while I am unable to explain with complete certainty why I was unable to reach my 30-respondent goal, I suspect that the many stresses associated with running a school during an international pandemic played a role. While I am pleased with my study's results and the contributions of respondents, a follow-up study is recommended to replicate this study with a larger cohort of respondents, which could provide more nuanced findings.

To meet the challenges of the role of the principalship, principals must have ongoing opportunities to be trained, developed, and supported that reflect modern evidence-based strategies. With a practitioner approach grounded in a theoretical base, the RAAP has

demonstrated the impact it has had on the role and leadership development of the principal that builds on standard university-based principal preparation programs. In its examination of the perceptions and impact on leadership development from recently appointed principals from the most current cohorts, 2017, 2018, and 2019, this study contributes to the body of literature on the RAAP beyond its much earlier comprehensive program evaluation conducted in 2008.

As a former school principal, I distinctly remember my own experiences in the role as the most challenging, invigorating, and humbling position I will likely ever hold. Unlike many principals, my journey toward leading a school was non-traditional: I began my career in higher education, then entered a public school as a school counselor, and finally made my way to educational leadership. While this path is not for everyone, I felt confident in my role—in part due to the education I received through my principal preparation program. As a former coordinator of professional learning, I have first-hand experience creating, supporting, and delivering professional development for principals along their career paths. I am passionate about creating strategies to support them in doing their jobs to the best of their ability in an ever-changing and always-challenging role.

I enjoyed researching and learning about the various professional standards for educational leaders and the degree to which principal preparation programs are able to inculcate that information. My research also reinforced the need for highly effective principal professional development, as well as the perceptions of those who were on the receiving end of those advanced-learning opportunities. Overall, I remain convinced that there is a need for ongoing analysis of professional development opportunities for principals.

I remain so thankful to those who chose to participate in this study. The time spent reading each synopsis was like reading a journal of private thoughts and truly spoke to various areas of the principalship that are too often not discussed. The transparency and vulnerability conveyed in the synopses reinforced that the role of the principalship can be lonely and requires ongoing support and encouragement. Despite the many challenges that educational leaders are required to address in the role of principal—coupled with those that emerged from the international pandemic, COVID-19, I remain convinced that our educational system is populated by gifted and committed professionals who care first and foremost about the welfare of both teachers and students. During the focus group interview I had the privilege of speaking with passionate educators who were facing truly unprecedented challenges. Nonetheless, they exuded

confidence and a resilient spirit to do everything in their power to ensure that the needs of their schools were being met. This study made me proud to have been in their ranks and to continue to support them by any means necessary.

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Appendix A
Cover Letter and Proposal to Use Secondary Data

April 6, 2020

Dr. Wayne Tripp, EdD.
Fellow
Virginia Tech Center for Organizational & Technological Advancement
467 Patricia Drive
Salem, Virginia 24153

Dear Dr. Tripp,

As discussed in our February email exchange, I am a doctoral student enrolled in the Virginia Tech Educational Leadership & Policy Studies with an anticipated graduation date of May 2021. My dissertation work is examining on-going professional development for novice principals. My purpose for contacting you is to request access to data from the Recently Appointed Administrators Program.

As requested, attached to this letter is a one-page written summary of my study. Included in the summary you will find the purpose of the study as well as the methodology and justification.

I am available by phone or email if you have any questions or need clarification of my request.

I appreciate your consideration and look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Jennifer S. Rucker, M.Ed.
VT Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Doctoral Student
Cell: 804-938-4338
Email: ruckerjenn18@vt.edu

Study Proposal

I. Purpose

The National Association of Secondary School Principals, NASSP, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, NAESP, attest that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction in impact upon student achievement (NASSP & NAESP, 2013). The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), 2015, affirmed that complexities of the role of principal contribute to turnover that directly impacts student achievement. A study conducted by Rangel (2018), aligned principal turnover with the lack of professional development. However, the United States Department of Education (2015) confirmed that less than 4% of Title II funds are used to support school leaders, which puts the responsibility of professional development on principal preparation programs.

Rowland (2017), stated the importance of strong principals having on-going training that aligns to modern evidence-based standards. Strong principals must have opportunities throughout their careers to be trained, developed, and supported in consistent ways that reflect modern, evidence-based standards.”

II. Area of Focus

There are effective research based programs available to the school leader that are providing professional development opportunities to address the concern of principal retention and efforts by school districts across the United States are being made to improve principal preparation programs. With only one published assessment conducted on the Recently Appointed Administrators’ Program, RAAP, in 2008, the researcher will analyze the impact of the program for novice principals.

III. Methodology

The goal of this study is to capture an understanding from novice principals the impact of participating in RAAP, therefore, a qualitative methodology will be used to collect data. Participants will include novice principals at the time of participation. Interviews will be transcribed and analyzed to confirm potential themes.

Appendix B

E-Mail Confirmation to Use Secondary Data

From: **Tripp, Wayne** wtripp@vt.edu
Subject: RE: Request
Date: April 8, 2020 at 9:52 AM
To: **Rucker, Jennifer** ruckerjenn18@vt.edu



Good morning Jennifer,

It is good to hear from you again. I am concerned to hear that you have been unwell, but happy to know that you are recovering and safe at home. This is indeed a strange time in all of our lives and worlds.

The communication you sent will suffice nicely for my communication with Drs. Harris and Richardson. I spoke with them about the possibility after our last communication, and they both seemed supportive and interested in your proposal. I will forward your communication to them today and see what they think.

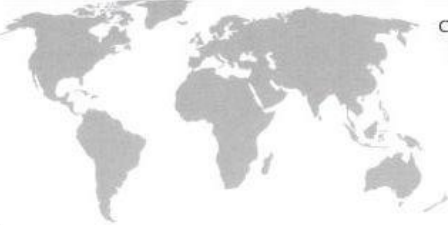
For what it is worth, one note of caution after reading your proposal: as you know, RAA participants are not only principals. Therefore, if you do delimit your study to principals, we will have to find a way to identify those who were principals when they went through the program. I think we can help you with that, and while I was fairly sure you knew that not all of the participants are principals, I thought I would suggest that you consider now how that might affect your planning. For what it is worth, we seemed to have quite a few APs this year.

At any rate, I will get back with you as soon as I hear from Dr. Harris and Dr. Richardson. All the best. Stay healthy and stay safe.

WT

Appendix C

CITI Program Course Certification of Completion



Completion Date 01-Sep-2019
Expiration Date 31-Aug-2022
Record ID 32440048

This is to certify that:

Jennifer Smith Rucker

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

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)



Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w5ec3f0ba-b29d-4582-93a8-293494de6c16-32440048

Appendix D

IRB Application Approval Letter



Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 19, 2020
TO: Ted S Price, Jennifer Smith Rucker
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Principal Perceptions and the Impact of Leadership Development Attributed to the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program
IRB NUMBER: 20-745

Effective October 19, 2020, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (d) category(ies) 2(ii),4(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii),4(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **October 19, 2020**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

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Appendix E

Reflective Synopsis Assignment



Virginia School Leaders Institute

Recently Appointed Administrators

Personal Vision Statement/Reflective Synopsis

There are two written assignments that you are expected to complete in order to successfully finish the program and to receive hours for the renewal of your teaching license.

We grant 72 clock hours of credit toward your licensure renewal. Typically, participants count those under Option 8, Professional Development Activities. Do note that you must have prior approval from your superintendent or the superintendent's designee to use Option 8. So check with them about that when you have the opportunity.

The Personal Vision Statement

In Workshop 4, we focus on Striving for Balance as an Administrator. As a part of that workshop I will lead you through an activity designed to get you to think about and eventually write a personal vision statement. Note that this will not be a professional vision statement or your school's vision or improvement plan. Rather it will be your vision for your life. We will give you lots of help to complete it and time in the workshop to write it. You will submit the personal vision statement electronically at the end of the workshop. That is the first of your two written assignments.

The Reflective Synopsis

Throughout RAA, you will be encouraged and asked to reflect on what you have seen, heard, and done and to make meaning from your experiences. See the Reflective Mantra on the wall. We will also give you time to not only think about and share those reflections, but also to write them down. We strongly encourage you to record your reflections throughout the program. Do it while the epiphany is fresh in your mind so that you do not lose it. At the end of the final workshop, we will ask you to submit a reflective synopsis of all your learnings and the meaning you have made of your experiences. The emphasis should be on the word reflective, not the word synopsis. We are not interested in a diary of what you did or a list of what you saw and did. We are interested in what meaning you made of your experiences. How will you use the knowledge, skills, and dispositions you have acquired? Have they carried over into your daily work? We want you to think deeply for the Reflective Synopsis and then electronically submit a 3-5 page written paper describing your reflections and learning that resulted from your participation in RAA.

Those are the only two written assignments that are required. You do need to understand that they are indeed requirements. We take both of them seriously. You must complete them in order to receive your certificate verifying your hours in the program.

Appendix F
Demographic Survey

Demographic Survey

Start of Block: Block 2

Q13 Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. After completing the survey you may be contacted to participate in a focus group with former participants of the Recently Appointed Administrator Program. This survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes to complete.

End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Demographic Data

Q1 Please provide your first and last name

Q2 What year were you appointed as a first year principal?

Q3 Please verify the age range at the time of your appointment as a first year principal.

20-25 (1)

25-30 (2)

30-35 (3)

35-40 (4)

40-over (5)

Q4 What is your racial or ethnic identity?

- Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin (1)
 - American Indian or Native American (2)
 - Asian American or Pacific Islander (3)
 - Black/African-American (4)
 - White (5)
 - Other: Specify (6) _____
-

Q5 What is your gender

- Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Other (3)
-

Q6 What is your current position?

- Principal (1)
 - Assistant Principal (2)
 - School-based employee: (3)

 - Central Office Personnel: (4)

 - Non-educator role (5)
-

Q7 How long have you been in this position?

0-5 years (1)

5-10 years (2)

Q8 Are you in the same position you were in as a participant in RAAP?

Yes (1)

No (2)

End of Block: Demographic Data

Appendix G
Participant Recruiter Email

Subject Line: Principal Perception and the Impact on Leadership Development IRB #20-745

Hello,

My name is Jennifer S. Rucker and I am a doctoral candidate enrolled in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I have received your name from Dr. Wayne Tripp, Dr. Wayne Harris and Dr. Sharon Richardson as a former participant in the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program. I am conducting a research study entitled *Principal Perceptions and the Impact of Leadership Development Attributed to the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program to the Recently Appointed Principal. (IRB #20-745)*

The purpose of this research study is to describe the experience of those who participated in the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program while serving in the role as principal and how participation in the RAAP impacted their leadership development. You have been invited to participate as a former participant of the Recently Appointed Administrator Program.

Your participation will consist of completing a demographic survey consisting of seven questions. The survey can be completed online through an approved Virginia Tech survey instrument, Qualtrics, and will take 7-10 minutes to complete. Secondly, your name could be selected to participate in a focus group discussion with other former principal participants. The focus group discussion will be video recorded and will take a maximum of 1 hour to be conducted. In addition, your willingness to participate will allow me to have access to use the reflective synopsis you submitted while participating in the program. All identifiable information will be extracted prior to the analysis and there are no known risks to participate in this study.

If you are interested in more information, please review the attached Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study. If you choose to participate please click yes to access the seven question demographic survey. If you choose not to participate please click no at the bottom of the Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Survey. Please know there will be no adverse consequences.

If you have any questions contact me at ruckerjenn18@vt.edu or 804-938-4338 or my dissertation chair, Dr. Ted Price, pted7@vt.edu.

Sincerely,

Jennifer S. Rucker
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Appendix H
Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study



Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Jennifer S. Rucker

IRB# and Title of Study: IRB #20-745 Principal Perceptions and the Impact of Leadership Development Attributed to the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program

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 enrolled in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I am conducting this research as part of my course work.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete a demographic survey consisting of seven questions. The survey can be completed online through an approved Virginia Tech survey instrument, Qualtrics, and will take 7-10 minutes to complete. Secondly, your name could be selected to participate in a focus group discussion with other former principal participants. The focus group discussion will be audio recorded and will take a maximum of 1 hour to be conducted. Participants will be randomly selected. If you are selected, you will be notified by an email from the researcher.

The demographic survey will consist of questions about yourself, former and current positions. If selected to participate in the focus group discussion, the researcher will ask a number of questions related to your perception regarding the impact the RAAP had on your leadership development. As part of the study, your reflective synopsis submitted during your participation in the program will be shared by the Recently Appointed Administrator Program and analyzed by the researcher. Data collected from your synopsis will be analyzed to confirm how participation contributed to your role as a principal.

Participants selected to participate will receive an email notification from the researcher. Within a week of receiving the email notification, selected participants will receive a calendar invitation from the researcher to participate in a virtual focus group discussion. The calendar invitation will include a Zoom link. This Zoom link will provide access to the focus group discussion. The

focus group discussion will be audio recorded and all identifiable information will be extracted prior to analysis. The recording is a requirement for participation. 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. Contact the researcher if you choose to withdraw. Upon receipt of the request, a confirmation email will be sent to you from the researcher. 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 which 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.

Any identifiable data collected during this research study will be kept confidential by the researcher. Data collected will be secured on the researcher's personal laptop computer. Your interview will be audio-recorded using Zoom provided through Virginia Tech. The recordings will be uploaded to a secure password-protected computer in the researcher's office that requires two-way authentication. The audio recording will then be transcribed and coded by the researcher. Transcripts will be coded using a pseudonym. The researcher will maintain a list that includes a key to the code. The master key and the recordings will be stored for 3 years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

WHO CAN I TALK TO?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Jennifer S. Rucker, ruckerjenn18@vt.edu or Dissertation Chair, Dr. Ted Price, pted7@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 I

Reminder Email to Prospective Participants

Subject Line: Follow Up: Principal Perception and the Impact on Leadership Development IRB #20-745

Dear Former RAAP Participant,

I hope this email finds you well. Six days ago, you received an invitation from me to participate in a research study conducted entitled *Perceptions and Impact of the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program to the Recently Appointed Principal*. As a former principal participant of the RAAP, I am interested in examining how your participation impacted your leadership development.

If you choose to participate please review the attached **Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study**.

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Jennifer S. Rucker
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Appendix J
Reminder Phone Script

Hello,

My name is Jennifer Rucker. I am a doctoral candidate enrolled in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program at Virginia Tech. This is a follow-up call to the email sent a few days ago requesting your participation in my research study. As a former participant in the School Leaders Recently Appointed Administrator Program I am reaching out to inquire of your interest to participate.

Please contact me at 804-938-4338 or by email at ruckerjenn18@vt.edu if you have any questions or to confirm your participation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Appendix K
Withdrawal Confirmation Email

Subject Line: Withdrawal Confirmation IRB #20-745

Dear Former RAAP Participant,

Thank you for notifying me of your decision to withdraw from the RAAP Study IRB #20-745 entitled *Principal Perceptions and the Impact of Leadership Development Attributed to the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program*.

As noted on the **Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study** you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

I hope you have a successful remainder of your school year.

Sincerely,

Jennifer S. Rucker, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech

Appendix L
Focus Group Notification Email

Subject Line: Focus Group Confirmation IRB #20-745

Hello,

Thank you for participating in the first portion of the research study, *Principal Perceptions and the Impact of Leadership Development Attributed to the Virginia Tech School Leaders Institute Recently Appointed Administrator Program (IRB #20-745)*.

You have been selected to participate in the focus group discussion with former principal participants of RAAP. Please take some time to complete this Doodle Poll to confirm your availability. Within a few days, you will receive a calendar invitation that will include a Zoom link. This Zoom link will provide access to the focus group.

As noted in the **Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study** document shared in my initial communication, the focus group discussion will be audio recorded and all identifiable information will be extracted prior to analysis and there are no known risks to participate in the study.

If you have any questions, please contact me at ruckerjenn18@vt.edu or 804-938-4338.

Sincerely,

Jennifer S. Rucker, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University