



Full Length Research Paper

Potential barriers to becoming a school principal: Perspectives of German and U.S. principals

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Abstract

The contributions of school principals to the success of schools are well-recognized in both Germany and the U.S.A. However, attracting qualified candidates to become school principals is a challenging endeavor in both countries. The purpose of this study was to identify barriers that may be lessening the motivation of teachers to becoming school principals. Using exploratory factor analysis, survey responses of 159 German principals and 134 U.S.A. principals were analyzed. Using Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation, the findings suggested that addressing teachers' concerns about increased job demands/time, relocations, needing specialized knowledge, handling circumstances beyond their control, and leaving satisfying work circumstances would increase the teachers' instrumentality and would therefore positively impact their motivation to become principals. Conclusions and implications of these findings were examined.

Keywords: Educational leadership, school principal recruitment, comparative education.

INTRODUCTION

A growing body of evidence indicates that effective school leadership significantly influences the quality of the learning environment in a school (Davis et al., 2005; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; Orr et al., 2010). Examining 27 published articles in the field, Robinson et al (2008) discovered that student learning was most directly impacted by leaders who: (a) establish goals and expectations; (b) strategically deploy resources; (c) plan, coordinate, and evaluate teaching and curriculum; (d) promote and participate in teacher learning and development; and (e) ensure an orderly and supportive environment in the school. Others have discovered that a school leader's abilities to create a vision and establish directions for a school (Billman, 2004; Harris, 2002), understand and develop people (Hallinger and Heck, 2002), and build productive relations with parents and community (Louis and Kruse, 1998; West, Ainscow et al., 2005) are directly associated with enhanced student outcomes (Huber et al., 2013; Robinson et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, attracting and retaining competent school leaders is becoming increasingly difficult (Bonsen

et al., 2002; Goldring and Taie, 2014). In many countries of the world, the attrition rates of principals leaving their positions are high (Huber, 2010; Landtag von Baden-Württemberg, 2012). While many principals are reaching retirement age, fewer young teachers are choosing career paths that lead to school leadership positions (Simon and Newman, 2004; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). In addition, many educators are reporting that the tasks associated with being an effective principal is simply no longer accomplishable (Beteille et al., 2011). Why are fewer teachers pursuing the principalship? This study attempts to identify factors that inhibit teachers from seeking school leadership roles.

This study continues the collaborative efforts (Hancock et al., 2012; Hancock and Müller, 2009; Hancock and Müller, 2014) of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and the Pädagogische Hochschule Ludwigsburg to identify potential motivators and inhibitors to becoming school principals in the U.S. and Germany. Because the U.S. and Germany are developed countries

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Effort} \rightarrow \text{Performance} \rightarrow \text{Outcomes (+ or -)} \\ \text{Motivation} = \text{Expectancy} \times \text{Instrumentality} \times \text{Valence} \end{array}$$

Figure 1. Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation

in which many educational environments struggle to attract and retain an adequate supply of qualified candidates for leadership roles (Hancock et al., 2012; Huber, 2004; Landtag von Baden-Württemberg, 2012), the current study sought to identify potential barriers to becoming school principals in both countries.

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation. This theory views people as purposeful beings who behave in accordance with their expectations that their efforts will result in outcomes that they value. Specifically, the amount of effort (i.e., motivation) a person exerts depends on three perceptual relationships: (a) expectancy – the person's subjective estimation of the likelihood of successfully performing a specific behavior; (b) instrumentality – the person's subjective estimation of the likelihood that a specific behavior will result in certain outcomes; and (c) valence – the positive or negative value that the person places on each of those outcomes. As suggested by Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), a person's perceptions of expectancy, instrumentality, and valence interact psychologically to influence the person's motivation to perform certain behaviors. To use the theory, one must first determine a person's perception of the relationship between effort and performance: "If I put forth adequate effort, what is the likelihood that I will perform well?" The theory then requires the person to assess the extent to which he or she perceives that his or her performance is instrumental to obtaining rewards and avoiding punishments: "If I perform the behavior to standard, what will be the likelihood that I receive something that I value and/or avoid an outcome that I dislike?" Finally, the theory is constructed so that the person must identify and evaluate the outcomes associated with performance: "What value do I place on each outcome that I receive if I put forth adequate effort to perform a certain behavior to standard?" Unpleasant outcomes have a negative valence whereas desirable outcomes have a positive valence. As illustrated in Figure 1 above, motivation to perform a specific behavior (e.g., becoming a school principal) is equal to expectancy times the sums of all instrumentalities times the valences. Various researchers (Feather, 1992; Hancock, 1995; Howard, 1989) have affirmed the usefulness of this theory toward explaining motivation to perform work-related behaviors in educational settings.

METHODS

Participants

159 German principals selected at random from schools

in the region of Stuttgart, Germany and 134 U.S. principals selected at random from schools in the south central region of the state of North Carolina participated in this study. Although these schools represented a sample of convenience, participants in Germany and U.S. were similar in gender, educational level, service as a teacher and principal, and levels of schools to the populations that they represented in their respective countries. No significant response differences were discovered based on the characteristics of the participants. Table 1 below reveals the participants' characteristics by country.

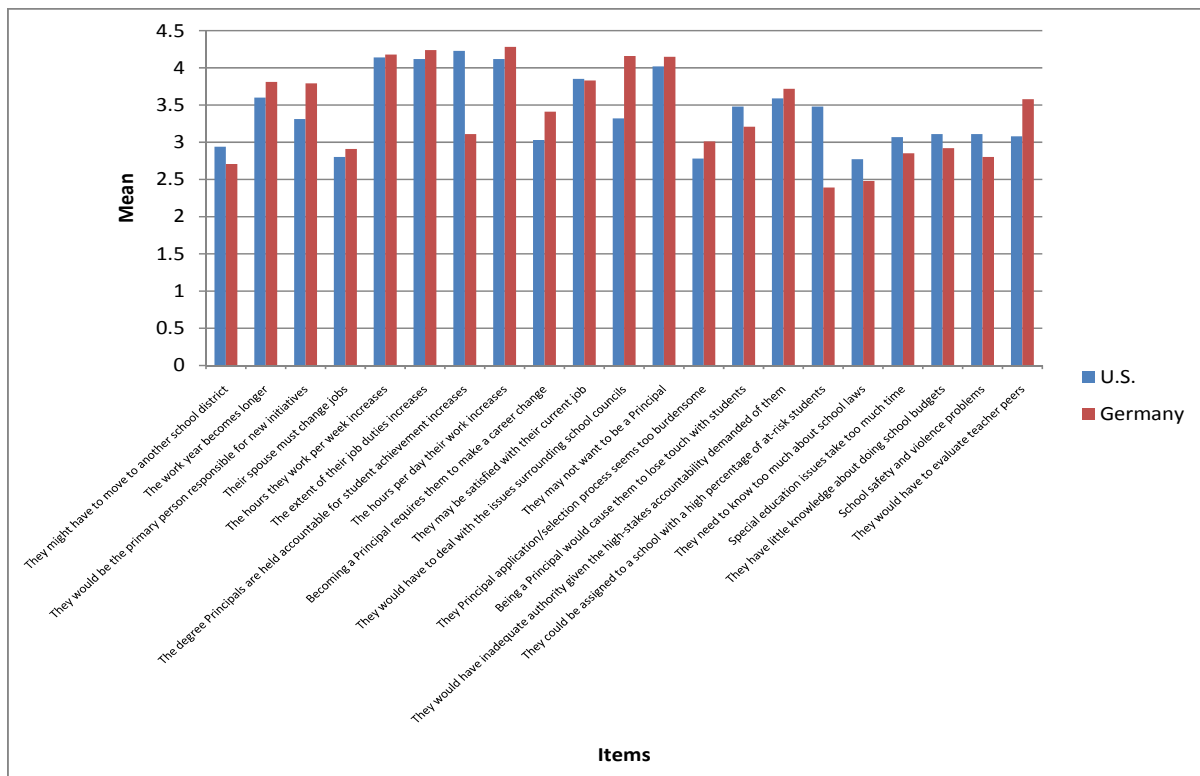
Procedures

Participants from both countries completed a survey (Appendix) based on a questionnaire (Winter et al., 2007) previously administered to 466 principal certified individuals in the State of Kentucky. The survey in the current study examined the extent to which the participants viewed 21 items that could be experienced in educational settings as potential barriers to teachers pursuing a principalship (Hancock et al., 2006; Winter et al., 2004). This survey was adopted from previous research that rendered reliable measures (Aiken, 1996; Gable and Wolf, 1993).

In accordance with Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation, a component of a person's motivation to become a school principal is the person's perception of instrumentality (i.e., "If I perform well as a principal, what will be the likelihood that I receive something that I value and/or avoid an outcome that I dislike?"). Applying the theory to this study, in order for a teacher's motivation to become a principal to be high, the teacher's instrumentalities toward the 21 items on the survey would need to be high. In other words, the teacher would need to perceive positive outcomes associated with becoming a principal as attainable and negative outcomes as avoidable. Failure to attain positive outcomes or to avoid negative outcomes associated with becoming a principal would be viewed by teachers as barriers. To better understand teachers' motivation to become principals, the current study sought to use this theoretical framework to identify potential barriers to becoming school principals in both the U.S. and Germany. The survey was divided into two parts. Part I solicited demographic information from the participants such as gender, marital status, educational level, experience as an educator, length of service as a principal, and level of service as a principal. Part II explored the extent to which the participants viewed 21

Table 1. Characteristics of U.S. and German participants

Gender	U.S.	Germany
Male	47.8%	62.4%
Female	52.2%	37.6%
Educational Level		
Bachelor's	4.4%	-
Master's	69.6%	74.5%
Specialist	22.0%	22.5%
Doctorate	4.0%	3.0%
Years of Service as Principal		
0-3	33.6%	26.5%
4-7	32.0%	28.4%
8-11	19.4%	22.7%
12-15	7.1%	11.9%
16-19	4.2%	7.2%
20-23	3.7%	3.3%
Levels of Schools as Principal		
Elementary	58.8%	62.0%
Middle School	22.6%	20.4%
High School	18.6%	17.6%

**Figure 2.** Barriers to Becoming a School Principal

items sometimes experienced in educational settings as potential barriers to teachers pursuing a position as a principal. Participants evaluated each item in Part II using a 5-point Likert scale (1 “strongly agree” to 5 “strongly disagree”).

RESULTS

Figure 2 illustrates the extent to which the U.S. and German participants agreed or disagreed that each of the 21 items sometimes experienced in educational settings

Table 2. The Five Factors and Corresponding Items for Barriers in the U.S.

	Factors	Items	Eigenvalue	Percent of Variance	Cumulative Percent
Barriers	Concern About Needing Specialized Knowledge	B16- They could be assigned to a school with a high percentage of at-risk students B17- They need to know too much about school laws B18- Special education issues take too much time B19- They have little knowledge about doing school budgets B20- School safety and violence problems B21- They would have to evaluate teacher peers	5.924	28.208	28.208
	Increases in Job Demands/ Time	B2- The work year becomes longer B3- They would be the primary person responsible for new initiatives B5- Work hours per week increase B6- The extent of their job duties increases B7- The degree Principals are held accountable for student achievement increases B8- Work hours per day increase	2.682	12.769	40.977
	Concern About Relocation	B1- They might have move to another school district B4- Their spouse must change jobs B9- Becoming a Principal requires them to make a career change	1.575	7.501	48.479
	Satisfaction With Current Work Circumstances	B10- They may be satisfied with their current job B11- They would have to deal with the issues surrounding school councils B12- They may not want to be a Principal	1.420	6.760	55.238
	Concern About Circumstances Beyond Their Control	B13- The Principal application/selection process is too burdensome B14- Being a Principal would cause them to lose touch with students B15- They would have inadequate authority given the high-stakes accountability demanded of them	1.189	5.663	60.902

would be viewed as potential barriers to teachers pursuing a position as a principal.

For both the U.S. and German samples, an exploratory factor analysis was used to evaluate the structure of the 21 potential barriers and to determine the existence of any correlated subscale factors. A principal components method was used as the extraction method. The decrease in eigenvalues (i.e., scree test) leveled off at five factors for the groups of barriers, each with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0. The total variance accounted for by the five factors was 60.9% and 76.5% for the U.S. and German samples, respectively. Pattern coefficients greater than .48 were used to determine relationships between the items and the factors. Using the literature regarding barriers to becoming a school principal (Hancock et al., 2006; Winter et al., 2004), each factor was inspected for possible common themes among

the items that loaded on the factor. The five factors, corresponding items, and statistical outcomes for the barriers are presented in Tables 2 above and 3 below for the U.S. and German samples, respectively.

The factor analysis pattern coefficients yielding the five factors are presented in Tables 4 and 5 below for the U.S. and German samples, respectively. The results of the factor analyses indicate that barriers to becoming a school principal are not unidimensional constructs. The factor analytic findings suggest that the barriers for principalship have five underlying dimensions: (a) increases in job demands/time; (b) concern about relocation; (c) concern about needing specialized knowledge; (d) concern about circumstances beyond their control; and (e) satisfaction with current work circumstances.

Table 3. The Five Factors and Corresponding Items for Barriers in Germany

	Factors	Items	Eigenvalue	Percent of Variance	Cumulative Percent
Barriers	Increases in Job Demands/Time	B2- The work year becomes longer B3- They would be the primary person responsible for new initiatives B5- Work hours per day increase B6- The extent of their job duties increases B8- Work hours per week increase B9- Becoming a Principal requires them to make a career change	11.900	56.665	56.665
	Satisfaction With Current Work Circumstances	B7- The degree Principals are held accountable for student achievement increases B10- They may be satisfied with their current job B11- They would have to deal with the issues surrounding school councils B12- They may not want to be a Principal B15- They would have inadequate authority given the high-stakes accountability demanded of them B21- They would have to evaluate teacher peers	1.398	6.658	63.324
	Concern About Needing Specialized Knowledge	B17- They need to know too much about school laws B18- Special education issues take too much time B19- They have little knowledge about doing school budgets B20- School safety and violence problems	1.139	5.424	68.747
	Concern About Circumstances Beyond Their Control	B13- The Principal application/selection process is too burdensome B14- Being a Principal would cause them to lose touch with students B16- They could be assigned to a school with a high percentage of at-risk students	.907	4.321	73.068
	Concern About Relocation	B1- They might have move to another school district B4- Their spouse must change jobs	.716	3.411	76.478

CONCLUSIONS

Attracting and retaining highly qualified school leaders is becoming increasingly important but difficult in many parts of the world. As a result, understanding the barriers that may inhibit practicing teachers from seeking the role of principalship is essential. The exploratory factor analysis of the survey data collected in this study suggests that in both Germany and the U.S., concerns about increased job demands/time, relocations, needing specialized knowledge, handling circumstances beyond their control, and leaving satisfying work circumstances may contribute to teachers' unwillingness to become a school principal. Concerns about increased job demands/time seriously deter many German and U.S. teachers from considering the role of principal. In both

countries, the number of hours per week that principals work generally far exceeds the number of hours worked by teachers. In addition, time off during the summer is usually less for principals than it is for teachers. The sheer quantity of tasks performed by principals necessitates many extra hours on the job. Principals are often obligated to attend extracurricular events not required of teachers and many of these events occur in the evenings and on weekends.

New programs and initiatives passed down from higher levels are often the primary responsibility of the principal at least until the tasks may be delegated to other leaders in the school. Especially in the U.S., the extent to which principals are held responsible for student achievement serves as a barrier for many teachers to become principals.

Table 4. Principal Component Analysis Extracting Five Barrier Components in the U.S.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
B18	.803				
B17	.787				
B19	.749				
B20	.673				
B21	.629				
B16	.580				
B6		.864			
B5		.843			
B8		.822			
B7		.755			
B2		.577			
B3		.546			
B1			.850		
B4			.813		
B9			.484		
B12				.745	
B10				.739	
B11				.486	
B14					.884
B13					.537
B15					.532

Note. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization; Rotation Converged in 5 Iterations

Table 5. Principal Component Analysis Extracting Five Barrier Components in Germany

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
B5	.849				
B6	.824				
B8	.820				
B2	.764				
B3	.572				
B9	.510				
B12		.727			
B10		.691			
B15		.657			
B11		.655			
B21		.553			
B7		.511			
B20			.833		
B19			.812		
B18			.681		
B17			.627		
B13				.714	
B16				.663	
B14				.496	
B1					.849
B4					.756

Note. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization; Rotation Converged in 5 Iterations

In both Germany and the U.S., teachers perceive the possible need to *relocate* to another school or school district if they become a principal as a reason for not

pursuing the role of principal. If relocation to a another school or school district is required in order to become a principal, many teachers who may otherwise be

interested in a principalship are concerned about the disruption to their personal lives such as the need for a spouse to change jobs or for children to change schools. In some cases, family separations necessitated by a teacher having to move to a different geographical region upon becoming a principal may serve as a barrier for a teacher to pursue the principalship. Furthermore, in neither the U.S. nor Germany does a principal normally receive reimbursement for the costs of a move. As a result, the financial burden incurred by a principal of possibly relocating to another setting can serve as a disincentive to becoming a principal. The perception that they would *need specialized knowledge* in order to become a principal serves as a barrier for many teachers to consider this career path. In both the U.S. and Germany, teachers suggest that knowledge of legal procedures and laws related to school administration, the complexities of special education, the intricacies of creating and controlling school budgets, especially in lean economic times, and the need to know more about how to ensure school safety and address school violence are significant impediments to becoming a principal. In both countries, concerns about evaluating the performance of teachers who were formally their peers prevents some teachers from becoming principals. Especially in the U.S., teachers report that the challenge of potentially leading a school with a high percentage of at-risk students serves as a deterrent to becoming a principal.

Another barrier to becoming a principal expressed by many teachers is the concern that they encounter *circumstances beyond their control* associated with becoming principals. For example, in both Germany and the U.S., the application and selection process for becoming a principal is burdensome. Candidates for a principal position must often complete multiple forms and applications, undergo criminal background investigations, solicit letters of support from supervisors and colleagues, and participate in an extensive interview process. In the U.S., to become a candidate for a principal position, a teacher must first become licensed by completing an arduous State licensure process. In Germany, a teacher typically undergoes multiple classroom observations by senior educators and must demonstrate school leadership potential. Even after being subjected to all of these procedures, there is no guarantee that candidate will be hired as a principal. As a result, many teachers do not elect to pursue a principal position.

In some cases, having to *leave satisfying work circumstances* in order to become a principal serves as an impediment for teachers to transition to a career as a principal. Occasionally, teachers who are drawn to the role of principal discover that their love of teaching outweighs their desire to seek a position as principal. Compared to principals, teachers generally enjoy closer relationships with students, more intimate involvement with curricula, control over interactions in a classroom, and fellowship with multiple peers in the school in which

they work. Although tempted to become a principal, when faced with assuming the extraordinary responsibilities of a school's primary leader, many teachers elect to remain in the environment that they love – the classroom.

Implications

In accordance with Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation, positively influencing a teacher's perception of instrumentality (i.e., "If I perform well as a principal, will I receive something that I value and/or avoid an outcome that I dislike?") by eliminating the barriers associated with becoming a principal should be a goal of school officials hoping to fill administrative positions from the present teaching corps. The findings of this study suggest that addressing teachers' concerns about increased job demands/time, relocations, needing specialized knowledge, handling circumstances beyond their control, and leaving satisfying work circumstances would increase the teachers' instrumentality and would therefore positively impact their motivation to become principals.

To address teachers' concerns about *increased job demands/time* if they move into a principal role, school officials should ensure the assignment of competent support personnel in the schools who can assume responsibility for some of the day-to-day burdens often associated with the principalship. These personnel would include assistant principals to help in areas such as student discipline, curriculum development, and facilities maintenance. Specialists to assist with student medical care, law enforcement, and focused attention on subject-area remediation should be available on an as-needed basis. Well-trained administrative staff to assist principals with clerical and managerial tasks should be assigned to the schools. In addition, teachers considering a transition to the role of principal should be given opportunities to develop flexible work schedules that allow them to assign to competent subordinates responsibility for attendance at selected after-school and weekend events. Teachers interested in possibly becoming a principal should be taught strategies for balancing the demands of their personal and professional lives and should be assured that they will be allowed to explore ways to attain this balance. To ease teachers' concerns about possible relocation if they become a principal, school officials should consider the location interests of principal candidates before making assignments to schools. For example, a teacher considering a career transition to a principalship may be interested in serving near her/his hometown, in a low-performing school, or in a diverse community. These principal candidates may be more motivated to become principals if they know that the hiring district will consider their site interests before making assignments. In addition, the locations of principal vacancies within a district or region should be

shared widely in order to allow prospective principals to discern the extent to which positions in which they are interested may be available. Teachers who want to remain in their current schools or districts upon becoming a principal should be advised by school officials of the advantages sometimes experienced when relocating away from one's current peer group after becoming a principal. Finally, financial support to assist with moving one's belongings or household to a new location should be considered for principals who are required to relocate.

To mitigate teachers' concerns about *needing specialized knowledge* if they become a principal, school officials should first identify the areas in which principal candidates indicate that they need more knowledge and skills. Officials should then develop focused and needs-driven professional development workshops or programs to ensure that the prospective principals' perceived needs are addressed. Experienced principals often suggest that they wish that had had more training in the areas school law, constituent relations, special education, and budget management. School officials interested in enticing teachers to become principals should create opportunities for these topics to be taught in order to ease teachers' reluctance to pursue a principalship. Soliciting the involvement of successful experienced principals to lead these workshops would allow teachers considering the role to learn from future peers and to gain confidence from witnessing their successes.

To lessen the concerns of teachers regarding leaving satisfying work circumstances in order to become a principal, school officials should emphasize the opportunities for broader impact as a principal than as a teacher. The transition from directing student learning in a classroom to influencing student learning and staff professional development for an entire school may resonate with teachers considering a move to the principalship. Because studies show that principals are often drawn to the profession in order to effect positive change in their environments, school officials must ensure that principal candidates know that their ideas and suggestions for improvement will be considered seriously and implemented if possible. Although some teachers considering the principalship may be tempted to remain teachers because they have become accustomed to the benefits and lifestyle of a teacher, these principal candidates should be reminded of the potential for positive outcomes associated with becoming a principal, such as increased compensation, positional advancement, and enhanced prestige and status.

In summary, although teachers' concerns about increased job demands/time, relocations, needing specialized knowledge, handling circumstances beyond their control, and leaving satisfying work circumstances may act as barriers to their becoming principals, school officials in the U.S. and in Germany have an array of possible measures with which to address these barriers

in order to increase teachers' motivation to become principals. Enhanced organizational support systems, professional development opportunities, better compensation and benefits, and opportunities to exercise autonomy and flexibility in their work environments are a few of the ways in which school officials may entice prospective principals to transition to the role of principal.

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Appendix

Principal survey

We invite you to complete this survey because you are a Principal and your opinions about the Principalship are valuable for improving school leadership. Your completion of this survey is voluntary. There are no risks or benefits to you for participating. The survey should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your completed survey will be held in strict confidence. Responses to the survey will be aggregated for reports or publications; thus, your identity will never be disclosed.

Directions

1. Please provide a response to every question. If none of the alternatives provided for a question corresponds exactly to your position or opinion, select the alternative that is closest to your position or opinion.
2. Follow the directions for each section. If you change a response, be sure that the change is legible.

Part 1: Demographics

Gender (check one): ☐ Female ☐ Male

Marital Status (check one): ☐ Married ☐ Single

Educational Level (check all degrees that apply):

☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ Specialist ☐ Doctorate

Degrees you are currently pursuing (check all that apply):

☐ Second Master's ☐ Specialist ☐ Doctorate

What year did you earn your highest degree? _____

Experience as an Educator

Since becoming an educator, what positions have you held and for how long? Please list chronologically beginning with your most recent position (i.e., teacher, counselor, resource teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal, other?)

<u>Position</u>	<u>Year Began</u>	<u>Year Ended</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

How long have you served as a Principal?

☐ 0-3 years ☐ 12-15 years ☐ 23-26 years ☐ 4-7 years ☐ 16-19 years

☐ 26-29 years ☐ 8-11 years ☐ 20-23 years ☐ 30 or more years

At what level are you currently serving as a Principal?

☐ Elementary ☐ High School ☐ Middle School ☐ Other (specify _____)

Appendix cont.

Part II: Barriers to becoming a principal

Possible barriers to becoming a Principal are listed below with scales ranging from left to right and from a low of 1 (strongly disagree) to a high of 5 (strongly agree). Please circle the one number that reflects your agreement or disagreement that the barrier would make it unlikely that teachers you know, who are interested in school leadership, would pursue a job as Principal.

Teachers are <u>unlikely</u> to pursue the job of Principal because . . .	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
1. They might have to move to another school district	1	2	3	4	5
2. The work year becomes longer	1	2	3	4	5
3. They would be the primary person responsible for new initiatives	1	2	3	4	5
4. Their spouse must change jobs	1	2	3	4	5
5. The hours they work per week increases	1	2	3	4	5
6. The extent of their job duties increases	1	2	3	4	5
7. The degree Principals are held accountable for student achievement increases	1	2	3	4	5
8. The hours per day their work increase	1	2	3	4	5
9. Becoming a Principal requires them to make a career change	1	2	3	4	5
10. They may be satisfied with their current job	1	2	3	4	5
11. They would have to deal with the issues surrounding school councils...	1	2	3	4	5
12. They may not want to be a Principal	1	2	3	4	5
13. The Principal application/selection process is too burdensome.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Being a Principal would cause them to lose touch with students	1	2	3	4	5
15. They would have inadequate authority given the high-stakes accountability demanded of them	1	2	3	4	5
16. They could be assigned to a school with a high percentage of at-risk students	1	2	3	4	5
17. They need to know too much about school laws	1	2	3	4	5
18. Special education issues take too much time	1	2	3	4	5
19. They have little knowledge about doing school budgets.	1	2	3	4	5
20. School safety and violence problems	1	2	3	4	5
21. They would have to evaluate teacher peers	1	2	3	4	5