UNDERSTANDING PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF STRESS AND BURNOUT: A QUALITATIVE

CASE STUDY IN NORTH TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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This qualitative case study examined principals' perceptions regarding stress and burnout, investigated perspectives regarding ways to alleviate chronic stress, and analyzed the extent to which future role expectations are related to chronic stress and feelings of burnout. Perceptions of eight elementary principals in large, suburban school districts who experienced similar professional preparation prior to receiving their first principalship were analyzed. Participants, identified through criterion sampling, completed a demographic survey and then participated in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Once data were collected, interviews were transcribed and analyzed to determine categories and themes. Findings revealed that participants struggle with significant stress in six specified domains: school type, students, parents and community, staff, district personnel, and other. Half of participants perceive that their stress will rise during the next five to ten years. Thirty-eight percent predicted that job stress will decline in the coming years, though they do not believe that identified stress factors will decrease. Instead, they believe that factors such as experience will help them to deal more effectively with the same challenges. Furthermore, 63% of participants do not plan to remain in their current principalship until retirement. All participants reported current personal stress-management strategies that fall into the categories of work-home balance or healthy habits. In campus-specific strategies, 63% focused on staff morale-building opportunities. Finally, 38% of participants did not feel that their district provides strategies that assist in the management of principalship stress.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Topic Overview

As a myriad of impacted individuals can readily attest, burnout constitutes a condition or state of mind that plagues human beings of all ages, walks of life, and career fields. Burnout “refers to an extreme form of job stress” (Combs, Edmonson, & Jackson, 2009, p. 10), manifests itself in a multitude of ways, and is characterized by a host of physical, mental, and emotional symptoms. While it is relevant to note that stress itself is not innately harmful and that a reasonable amount of stress represents a typical part of daily routine (Colbert, 2008), elevated levels of chronic stress can produce adverse physical reactions in the human body (Boyland, 2011; Clarke, 1985; Colbert, 2008; Wheeler, 2007). In fact, “when an individual experiences high levels of ongoing stress, the excessive release of stress hormones can, over time, cause damage to cells, organs, and tissues” (Boyland, 2011, p. 1). Importantly, Boyland also emphasized the following critical medical points:

Health care specialists are becoming increasingly concerned about chronic stress because it has been associated with a variety of health problems including muscle tension and pain, memory loss, suppression of the immune system, and even damage to the heart or other organs. (p. 1)

Furthermore, prolonged or chronic stress can debilitate the operation of the body’s adrenal system. Because the adrenal system constitutes the body’s source for adrenalin, a critical hormone for energy production, a compromised adrenal system can potentially result in diminished daytime energy levels and interrupted nighttime sleep patterns (Larimore, 2003).

Thus, medical evidence shows a distinct correlation between unaddressed chronic stress and resultant exhaustion, burnout, and serious physical or mental illnesses (Boyland, 2011;
Clarke, 1985; Colbert, 2008; Wheeler, 2007). Burnout can leave a negative, indelible mark on the health and quality of life for those affected; this reality constitutes a major reason why those who struggle with burnout typically attempt to identify the catalyst or cause for their burnout. Furthermore, those who struggle with burnout desire to alter their lifestyle in order to alleviate the negative symptoms of burnout and replace those feelings with a more positive sense of rejuvenation.

Within the field of education administration, burnout and chronic stress plague countless principals at various institutional levels, from those who lead in elementary schools to those who serve as the administrators of middle and high school campuses (Adams, 1999; Allison, 1997; Andreyko, 2010; Boyland, 2011; Combs et al., 2009; Doud & Keller, 1998; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). Because elementary principals frequently constitute the only campus administrator of their building and therefore do not often have a vice-principal with whom to share the work load, their administratively isolated work environment might place them in an even more susceptible position for chronic, work-related stress (Boyland, 2010; Combs et al., 2009). Though numerous studies have examined this burnout and chronic stress predicament with regard to campus principals, results thus far have remained somewhat ambiguous, and further study is needed to determine the most significant sources of stress for elementary principals within suburban districts of the north Texas area.

Problem Statement

Numerous researchers have examined conceivable principal burnout symptoms and causes, though the vast majority of those studies did not specifically focus on principals of elementary campuses. Instead, some studies took a broader look at the subject of burnout,
analyzing its impact on a wide variety of professions, while other studies closely examined burnout as it pertained to administrators in other specific regions of the United States and world. Therefore, a great deal of ambiguity and conflicting research exists regarding the specific primary causes of burnout for elementary principals. With additional information, it may be possible to identify problems and address related retention issues. Thus, a deeper understanding of the factors that most significantly contribute to the chronic stress and burnout of elementary principals in north Texas may help both district supervisors and campus administrators as they strive to alleviate stress and prevent burnout. Therefore, this qualitative research study sought to investigate the perspectives of elementary principals in the north Texas region, regarding potential issues related to stress and burnout.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study was designed to examine the current status of elementary principals’ perceptions regarding their level of stress and burnout, identify causes for the stress, and investigate principals’ suggestions by which stress might be alleviated. This study also analyzed the extent to which future role expectations are related to the chronic stress and feelings of burnout that elementary principals perceive. Knowledge related to causes and possible solutions for elementary principal stress that results in burnout is needed in order to keep quality school leaders who stay in the profession longer than a few years.

Research Questions

1. What are elementary principals’ perceptions about the causes of their stress?

2. What are elementary principals’ perceptions about their level of stress?
3. To what extent are future role expectations (expectancy-value theory) related to the ongoing stress that elementary principals perceive?

4. What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding ways to address their stress and its causes?

Conceptual Framework

Because the research questions for this study focused on principal stress in current role demands and future role expectations, this study was undergirded by a two-part conceptual framework (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Conceptual framework of study.](image)
The Yerkes-Dodson law (Endler, Rey, & Butz, 2012; Keller, 2007; “What Is the Yerkes-Dodson law?,” n.d.) and Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) comprised the first part of the conceptual framework for this qualitative study. Both of these theories seek to explain how people are impacted by chronic stress with regard to current role demands. The Yerkes-Dodson law suggests an inverted-U relationship between pressure and performance (Figure 2). The Yerkes-Dodson law, initially defined in 1908 by psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dillingham Dodson, proposes that elevated stress within reasonable bounds can boost performance. Conversely, an extreme amount of stress can result in decreased performance. Keller (2007) elaborated on the Yerkes-Dodson law, as follows:

The Yerkes-Dodson law describes the nonlinear relationship between (1) arousal level, (2) task complexity or difficulty and (3) level of test performance. The theorem holds that maximal test performance occurs at increasing levels of arousal on easy test items whereas the relation between arousal and performance is curvilinear in the case of difficult test items such that performance decreases when the level of arousal exceeds a critical threshold. (p. 326)

Thus, the Yerkes-Dodson law supports the belief that ongoing stress experienced by principals in their job role can lead to burnout if intervention does not occur, as supported by a myriad of research over a span of decades (Adams, 1999; Andreyko, 2010; Bellott, 1982; Boyland, 2011; Brock & Grady, 2002; Carr, 1994; Clarke, 1985; Cohen, 1989; Colgan, 2003; Combs et al., 2009; Gorkin, 2004; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010).

The apprehension felt by a student immediately prior to his semester exam constitutes an illustration of the Yerkes-Dodson law in action. The presence of reasonable stress improves a student’s ability to concentrate and recall the needed test information, while heightened stress can significantly diminish a student’s focus and cause him or her to struggle in recalling the accurate test responses. Similarly, an optimal amount of stress enhances a basketball
player’s skill as he attempts a three-point shot at a pivotal game moment. A surge of overwhelming anxiety, however, might result in the player missing the shot that he was physically capable of making (“What Is the Yerkes-Dodson law?,” n.d.).

According to the Yerkes-Dodson law, it is important to note that the preferred and most productive amount of stress differs from task to task. Generally speaking, advanced tasks requiring critical thinking show performance decline sooner than tasks involving less complexity, even when the stress level for both tasks was similar. Hence, individuals are able to manage a higher amount of stress when completing an easy task. While more stress, or arousal, might be needed for the initiation of a difficult task, a sustained amount of elevated stress would impede the completion of the complex task more than it would prevent the completion of a simple expectation (Coon & Mitterer, 2007; Hayes, 2000).

![Figure 2. Yerkes-Dodson law, suggesting an inverted-U relationship between stress and performance (“Autoregulate Better,” 2014, para. 12).](image)
Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) transactional model of stress and coping (Figure 3) also contributed to the first part of this study’s conceptual framework because this theory explains the root causes of chronic stress.

![Diagram of Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping](Image)

*Figure 3. Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional model of stress, proposing that appraisal of a situation and perception of one’s ability to cope play a significant role in whether or not stress results (as cited in “Ivanity,” 2013, para. 6).*

According to Lazarus and Folkman, stress results from a disproportionate relationship between expectations and possession of the appropriate abilities and resources to meet the specified expectation. Stress also ensues when a person believes that he or she is not able to deal with the present level of anxiety or pressure. Therefore, stress is not defined as the straightforward, unavoidable result when a stressor appears. Instead, Lazarus and Folkman advocated, as a
result of their copious research, that coping mechanisms and availability of needed resources can influence an individual’s response to a stressor, thus allowing for the stress to be managed and controlled.

While the first part of this study’s conceptual framework was derived from both Yerkes-Dodson law ("What Is the Yerkes-Dodson law?,” n.d.) and Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional model of stress and coping (1984), the second part of this study’s framework was based upon expectancy-value theory (Figure 4). According to the stated research questions, this study also investigated the extent to which future role expectations (expectancy-value theory) are related to the ongoing stress and/or burnout experienced by elementary principals. Schunk (2008) upheld that the expectancy-value theory is based upon the premise that “behavior depends on how much individuals value a particular outcome (goal, reinforcer) and their expectancy of attaining that outcome as a result of performing given behaviors” (p. 466). Consequently, this study sought to analyze the extent to which principals value their perceived outcome/goal and the extent to which they expect they will achieve that perceived outcome as a result of their chosen behaviors and efforts.

![Figure 4. Expectancy-value theory, established upon the assertion that “behavior depends on how much individuals value a particular outcome (goal, reinforcer) and their expectancy of attaining that outcome as a result of performing given behaviors” (Schunk, 2008, p. 466).]
According to research, a condition of chronic stress can lead to serious physical and emotional issues that heighten a person’s risk for burnout if intervention does not occur (Bellott, 1982; Boyland, 2011; Brock & Grady, 2002; Carr, 1994; Carruth, 1997; Cohen, 1989; Combs, 2009). This medical relationship between stress and a resultant case of burnout, which is more deeply explored in Chapter 2, constitutes the reason that both stress and burnout serve as focal points in this study.

Significance of the Study

When educational research reports an annual principal turnover rate as high as a staggering 40 percent (Johnson, 2005), it is clear that finding and implementing remedies for principal burnout is of paramount importance. Based upon available medical research (Boyland, 2011; Clarke, 1985; Colbert, 2008; Larimore, 2003; Wheeler, 2007), one can understand the value in finding and supporting those principals who are struggling with chronic stress or burnout. Not surprisingly, persistent stress, with its unfavorable medical implications, can prevent optimal job performance and result in burnout (Boyland, 2011; Brock & Grady, 2002). Boyland (2011) suggested, “In terms of the principalship, this issue has even broader implications because an entire school can be negatively affected when a principal becomes ill or can no longer perform at optimal levels due to chronic stress” (p. 2). It would also stand to reason that a high rate of principal attrition, resulting in frequent principal turnover at the campus level, would yield a negative impact on the formation and maintenance of a unified campus vision for continued growth in the area of student achievement. Furthermore, when a campus frequently shifts its focus due to changes in leadership, much time and energy are expended in the constant defining and re-defining of the campus vision and goals. This
immense amount of time that is repeatedly invested in the initial steps of the campus vision unification process could be better utilized in refining campus systems and focusing on plans for increased student achievement if principals stayed in their roles for a lengthier tenure.

Besides the benefits reaped by school personnel and students when principals remain in their roles for a longer period of time, principals are more productive and efficient and create a more positive campus environment when they feel a level of satisfaction and contentment in their job. Therefore, principals with an optimistic outlook should be able to cultivate a more positive campus culture conducive to higher levels of both teacher and student performance. For these reasons, gaining a deeper understanding of the most potent factors contributing to principal burnout will prove beneficial for researchers, central office administrators and educational administration practitioners alike. Furthermore, additional information may help them to more effectively identify, alleviate and prevent burnout symptoms before an individual reaches the breaking point, resulting in a career that is terminated far too soon.

Definition of Terms

- **Burnout** – Burnout “refers to an extreme form of job stress” (Combs, Edmonson, & Jackson, 2009, p. 10), manifests itself in a multitude of ways, and is characterized by a host of physical, mental and emotional symptoms.

- **Expectancy-value theory** – This theory is based upon the premise that “behavior depends on how much individuals value a particular outcome (goal, reinforcer) and their expectancy of attaining that outcome as a result of performing given behaviors” (Schunk, 2008, p. 466).

- **Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional model of stress** – This theory proposes that stress results from a disproportionate relationship between expectations and an individual’s perceived possession of the appropriate abilities and/resources to meet the specified expectation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

- **Levels of Stress, As Defined by the Researcher:**
  - Low – insignificant, easily sustainable over an indefinite period of time
Moderate – significant, though sustainable with effort over an indefinite period of time

Chronic – very significant, not a level that you desire to sustain or are able to sustain over an indefinite period of time

- Perception – For the purposes of this study, perception constitutes the way that each person views the world around him or her.

- Yerkes-Dodson law – This law was first defined in 1908 by psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dillingham Dodson and proposes that elevated stress within reasonable bounds can boost performance. Conversely, an extreme amount of stress can result in decreased performance (“What Is the Yerkes-Dodson law?,” n.d.).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study and focuses on the undergirding conceptual framework. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to chronic stress and principal burnout, as well as expectancy-value theory. The methodology of this study is discussed in Chapter 3, while Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the data and results of the research. Chapter 5 provides a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further studies in the area of principal burnout.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chronic stress and burnout plague numerous campus principals, impacting those in elementary leadership as well as those assigned to middle or high school campuses (Adams, 1999; Allison, 1997; Andreyko, 2010; Boyland, 2011; Combs et al., 2009; Doud & Keller, 1998; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). Though many studies broadly addressed these topics, very little data focus on burnout as it specifically relates to principals at elementary campuses. Additionally, very little research focuses on elementary principals in the north Texas area. Due to differences in accountability, community demographics and role demands, data related to burnout could potentially vary among different regions and states of the United States of America.

Thus, this qualitative study investigated the work roles, environment, and issues of identified principals at elementary campuses in northern suburbs of Dallas who experienced similar professional preparation prior to receiving their first principalship. Furthermore, this qualitative study was designed to examine the current status of elementary principals’ perceptions regarding their level of stress and burnout, identify causes for the stress, and investigate principals’ suggestions by which stress might be alleviated. This study also analyzed the extent to which future role expectations are related to the chronic stress and feelings of burnout that elementary principals perceive. Information gathered as part of the research process was analyzed to determine the extent to which principals report a struggle with
burnout and to identify the primary reasons for their chronic stress. Specifically, this study addressed the following four research questions:

1. What are elementary principals’ perceptions about the causes of their stress?

2. What are elementary principals’ perceptions about their level of stress?

3. To what extent are future role expectations (expectancy-value theory) related to the ongoing stress that elementary principals perceive?

4. What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding ways to address their stress and its causes?

This chapter includes a review of literature related to principal burnout, focusing first on identified challenges of the principal role and the impact on principal burnout of specific factors such as gender, socioeconomic status and tenure. Second, this review examines the relationship between ongoing stress and medical issues. Third, focus is given to district programs that support principals in their job role. Finally, alternative views of principal burnout and positive aspects of the principal role are explored.

Stress in the Principal Role

According to Sogunro (2012), the amount of stress in schools is higher now than at any other point in history. The author elaborated further, stating the following:

In contemporary times, stress in school administration is an everyday thing that builds up as a result of the growing demands of the job and that continues to take a toll on the professional and personal lives of principals and those whom they administer. (p. 664)

Sogunro also highlighted that all participants in his study struggled with at least one type of job-related stress. Alarmingly, more than 96% of his study participants reported that their stress had reached a point where it was negatively impacting their health and job performance.
Research reveals that a disturbingly large number of principals have contemplated a job change and that numerous recently-trained principals have elected to remain in the classroom rather than apply for administrative posts (Adams, 1999). Adams’ study identified “myriad responsibilities that drain energies and draw principals away from their primary roles as facilitators of teaching and learning” (para. 4). Moreover, Adams asserted that principals in modern society are faced with a dichotomy of expectations, stating the following:

Those of us with professional responsibility for the preparation and support of new administrators do tell them that the role of the principal is to create and sustain an environment that maximizes teachers’ ability to teach and students’ ability to learn. (para. 4)

When principals attempt to meet this lofty expectation, however, Adams further asserted that “the efforts of principals to do just that have become randomized and sometimes even trivialized -- by their need to respond to requirements [such as first meeting the basic food/clothing needs of students so that they are capable of focusing on academic tasks]” (para. 5). Isolation, heavy job burdens, and political pressures have also been identified in research as factors contributing to administrator burnout (Colgan, 2003). Furthermore, according to Adams (1999), principals cite several additional challenges of their administrative position that contribute to feelings of burnout or the desire to pursue a different career.

Abundant anecdotal and documentable evidence reveals that principals regularly grapple with demands to layer on new responsibilities not readily seen as related to teaching and learning. They report, as attendant to these challenges, the erosion of their authority to affect change in their organizations, escalating expectations for accountability, lack of support, statutes and mandates that dictate practice, compensation that is not commensurate with their responsibilities, long hours that leave little time for family or personal renewal, and a pervasively stressful political environment for school leaders. (para. 7)
Many other research studies cite similar lists of issues that face school principals in today’s society. Besides naming the issues listed above, numerous sources acknowledge that principals face several other challenges besides sustaining school operations on a daily basis. These challenges include assisting struggling students, combatting criticism from parents and striving to reinvigorate frustrated teachers (Boyland, 2011; Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; De Leon, 2006; Whitaker, 1995). Combs et al. (2009) added that another major source of stress for principals is society’s misconception of what a principal’s role truly entails. Along with inadequate student achievement, pupil behavioral struggles and diminished monetary resources, the public’s misinterpretation of the campus administrator’s job plays a significant role in contributing to principal burnout (Allison, 1997; Combs et al., 2009; Gmelch & Gates, 1998; Whitaker, 1996).

Regarding the identification of factors leading to an increased level of overall stress for principals, Bellott (1982) contended that “competition within complex organizations today is a risk factor not often recognized by organizations” and further stated that “all organizations are vulnerable to stress, not only at the executive level but, especially, at the middle-management level” (p. 1). This heightened level of stress has led many organizations to consider the value of programs designed for the management of stress, such as exercise regimens, recreational activities, and obligatory vacation plans (Bellott, 1982). Boyland’s 2011 exploratory study collected and analyzed data pertaining to the factors contributing to stress for elementary public school principals in Indiana. Boyland made the following observations:

The public school principalship has evolved considerably in recent years. Changes in society, such as demographic fluctuations, economic downturns, and political shifts, have significantly affected public schools and impacted the role of the school leader. While the principalship has long been described as a challenging position, many
principals are reporting escalating pressure as well as serious concerns regarding time demands. Increasingly long hours, growing lists of responsibilities, funding difficulties, and rising accountability standards are creating what some are characterizing as a culture of stress for school principals. (p. 1)

Burnout in Middle School Principals

These numerous challenges that significantly contribute to a culture of stress for campus administrators, according to Boyland (2011), also increase stress and burnout, specifically among middle school principals. Andreyko (2010) conducted a study that closely investigated “the relationship of stress, burnout, and coping strategies among middle school principals in Western Pennsylvania” (p. 1). According to Andreyko, the research “assessed coping skill preferences among middle school principals, especially regarding their age, gender, marital status, experience, and school enrollment” (p. 1). This study substantiated that the middle school principal’s job, much like that of the elementary principal, constitutes a source of significant stress “due to the scope of responsibilities at that level” (p. 1). Furthermore, Andreyko asserted the following:

The work world of principals has expanded in both complexity and quantity. Principals are spending more time on the job than they had in the past, and they are navigating ways to be successful in the high stakes work context that has permeated the job. This changing nature of the principalship has required more time, political savvy, stress, accountability measures, legal expertise, and the ability to deal with health concerns. (p. 1)

Again, this study by Andreyko represents information based upon only one small area of the country. It is therefore possible that the impact of various stress factors might vary based upon a school’s specific location within the country and the demographic information for that particular campus.
Decrease in Principal Applicants

Besides heightening stress for practicing principals, research additionally suggests that these seemingly insurmountable challenges of the principal role have discouraged many newly trained administrators from pursuing principal positions. One specific example, from a respected university in California, clearly portrayed the significant decrease of applicants for available principal posts, as follows:

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at California State University, Northridge, regularly receives requests from school districts in its service area for recommendations of recently qualified candidates to consider for administrative positions. Increasingly, these calls from human resource administrators and superintendents include comments expressing some surprise and much frustration that a principalship opening that may have generated 75 applications a few years ago has now produced just four to six letters and resumes. (Adams, 1999, para. 11)

In order to gain deeper information regarding the reasons for this shortage of applicants for campus administration, a study that focused on the three California counties of Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara was initiated in April 1999. Adams (1999) first described the specific group of individuals who were targeted for this study, stating that surveys were mailed to all Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies students at California State University who had completed requirements for the California Preliminary Administrative Services Credential during the past five years. The survey requested that students “identify themselves only in terms of gender, age range, the year in which they had received their credentials, current position, enrollment of the districts for which they worked, and the county in which they were employed (“Where Have All the Candidates Gone” section, para. 1). Adams described the results as follows:

The survey yielded a 42 percent response. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents were female and 41 percent male, closely mirroring the gender ratio of the department’s
student population in recent years. More than half the respondents fell into the 25-40 age range at which administrative candidates traditionally seek entry level administrative posts. The next largest population segment (18 percent) fell in the 46-50 age range. (para. 2)

Next, detailed findings from the study were explained and clarified. These findings painted a much clearer picture of the dilemma faced by both the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at California State University, Northridge and the surrounding California school systems. According to Adams (1999), 38% of study participants are presently working in administrative assignments including “deans, assistant principals, elementary or high school principals and directors” (“Where Have All the Candidates Gone” section, para. 3). Adams also emphasized a concerning statistic, highlighting that “an alarming 26 percent of this group of practicing administrators report that they are considering leaving administration, and cite as reasons salary, hours, inadequate support, demands of the job, and lack of time for family (para. 4). Adams also provided the following additional description regarding those who chose not to work in the field of education administration:

The 62 percent who are not currently serving in administrative positions offer, perhaps, the most trenchant insights into the current lack of applicants for administrative assignments. Fewer than 1 percent indicated that their reluctance to relocate to another area had influenced their decision not to seek administrative positions. However, 46 percent of this group indicated that their decisions not to seek jobs as school administrators were a function of greater satisfaction with their current roles (primarily classroom teachers, coordinators or those currently enrolled in doctoral programs) than they anticipated would be the case were they administrators, given the testy political environment, long hours, stress, lack of support and inadequate compensation relative to the responsibilities. (para. 5)

Interestingly, when asked a direct question about what type of job they planned to pursue in five years from the present time, 66% of those who responded to the survey indicated that they did plan to pursue an administrative position (Adams, 1999). Adams further
clarified that “what this suggests is that those not willing to consider administrative responsibilities now are optimistic that conditions for effective and rewarding administrative practice will become more favorable in the near future” (“Where Have All the Candidates Gone” section, para. 6).

It is imperative to point out that this detailed study regarding those who did or did not choose to pursue a campus administrative position following certification focused only on a specific region of California. It would be intriguing to know how north Texas would compare, as suburban districts traditionally have fared much better than urban districts in being able to attract qualified candidates to fill open principal positions. Though this topic is not the focus of this current study, it is an area where further research is needed for many other parts of the country and world.

Factors Related to Stress and Burnout

Interestingly, some research studies that analyzed the stressful challenges faced by campus and district leaders in education administration also examined the relationship between burnout and factors such as gender, campus socioeconomic status, and position tenure. In Carruth’s (1997) study that focused primarily on the chronic stress and feelings of burnout felt by high school principals, 26% of the study’s participants disclosed that they personally suffer from elevated levels of emotional exhaustion. It is intriguing to note, as well, that some researchers noted a distinction between genders in regard to the management of job stress. According to Carruth’s findings, male campus administrators struggled less with emotional exhaustion than did female principals (1997). Other researchers, however, argued that gender’s function in the onset of burnout is ambiguous at best (Combs et al., 2009). While
some research results displayed more notable burnout rates for males than females (Combs et al., 2009; Thompson, 1985), other studies revealed that females were more susceptible to chronic stress and burnout (Blix, Cruise, Mitchell, & Blix, 1994; Combs et al., 2009; Kelley & Gill, 1993). Not enough reliable information was available in order to make any determination regarding the influence of gender on principal stress and burnout.

Surprisingly, Carruth (1997) found no measurable distinction or correlation between the burnout level of the principal and the socioeconomic classification of the campus, though his study did show that principals with less experience in their role scored higher in the area of emotional exhaustion than did their more seasoned counterparts. However, other research studies yield conflicting data with regard to the relationship between position tenure and burnout. Some researchers believed that less time in a job role indicated a higher amount of burnout due to the fact that those individuals were still working to acquire needed job skills (Combs et al., 2009; Callison, 1993). On the other hand, Kelley and Gill (1993) upheld that burnout symptoms increased during a person’s job tenure (as cited in Combs et al., 2009).

Furthermore, Gorkin (2004) outlined four phases of burnout which play a key role when a person is experiencing chronic stress in the work place. Comprehension of these degrees of burnout, as described by Gorkin, provides a better understanding of the internal mental and emotional battle that a principal faces when attempting to combat the negative and destructive feelings of burnout. First, Gorkin defined burnout as “the gradual process by which a person, in response to prolonged stress and physical, mental, and emotional strain, detaches from work and other meaningful relationships” (p. 1). Next, he listed the four stages as follows:
1. Physical and Mental Exhaustion
2. Shame and Doubt
3. Cynicism and Callousness

Lastly, Gorkin discussed the fundamental steps necessary to help one recover from burnout, urging stressed individuals to initially focus on “good grief” (p. 24). Importantly, he emphasized that “you don’t have to wait till you are in the fourth stage of burnout to start grieving. It takes time to tend to your wounds, realize that significant others still love and respect you, and regain your sense of identity” (p. 24). He also recommended that burnout sufferers secure assistance from a mentor or counselor so that it becomes easier to look objectively at the whole situation rather than focusing only on one’s weaknesses. Gorkin’s “Four R’s of Recovery” include “running, reading, retreating and writing” (p. 24).

In summary, reviewed research demonstrates that the relationship between stress and factors such as gender, campus socioeconomic status, and position tenure is questionable at best. Results conflicted from one study to another in these areas and findings were not able to be generalized at this juncture. It is certainly worthy of time and effort to focus research efforts on how principals can most effectively combat feelings of chronic stress and burnout. While Gorkin’s study might be classified as overly simplistic, it did provide a basic understanding of the burnout stages and provided a few ways to make positive life changes.

Relationship between Stress and Medical Issues

Another related topic found in the review of applicable literature was the relationship between chronic stress and medical problems. Boyland (2011) clarified that “although some
stress is a common and necessary element of life, excessive unmanaged stress has been linked to a long list of physical and mental health problems” (p. 1). In related research that was conducted with principals in Australia, burnout and ongoing stress experienced by campus administrators frequently led to a struggle with anxiety and/or depression (Carr, 1994). In fact, 37.2% of the study participants indicated that they battled with anxiety and/or depression.

Though a reasonable and managed amount of stress constitutes a conventional part of daily routine (Bellott, 1982; Colbert, 2008), high levels of continual stress can induce detrimental physical reactions within the human body (Boyland, 2011; Clarke, 1985; Colbert, 2008; Wheeler, 2007). In fact, “when an individual experiences high levels of ongoing stress, the excessive release of stress hormones can, over time, cause damage to cells, organs, and tissues” (Boyland, 2011, p. 1). Importantly, Boyland also emphasized the following critical medical points:

Health care specialists are becoming increasingly concerned about chronic stress because it has been associated with a variety of health problems including muscle tension and pain, memory loss, suppression of the immune system, and even damage to the heart or other organs. (p. 1)

Additionally, prolonged or chronic stress can debilitating the operation of the body’s adrenal system. Because the adrenal system serves as the body’s source for adrenalin, an essential hormone for energy production, a depleted adrenal system can potentially result in diminished daytime energy levels and interrupted nighttime sleep patterns (Larimore, 2003). Boyland strongly emphasized that “left untreated, chronic stress can eventually lead to exhaustion, burnout, and serious physical or mental illnesses” (2011, p 2). Taking it even a step further, Boyland asserted the following:
Armed with this knowledge, one can clearly see the value in identifying and assisting individuals who are experiencing high levels of ongoing job stress. In terms of the principalship, this issue has even broader implications because an entire school can be negatively impacted when a principal becomes ill or can no longer perform at optimal levels due to chronic stress. Chronic stress has been shown to negatively impact job performance and can lead to burnout or position change. (p. 2)

Based upon this medical evidence, researchers emphasize that supervisors should make it a priority to keep a close eye on the stress level maintained by principals on an ongoing basis and should espouse procedures that provide support to campus administrators so that they are able to effectively handle the demanding expectations of the principal role (Boyland, 2011; Brock & Grady, 2002; Queen & Queen, 2005).

These medical data definitely support the relationship between chronic stress and the probable onset of medical problems. As cited here, numerous research studies were conducted to investigate this relationship. While different studies focused on varied types of medical concerns, the consensus among studies consistently upheld the assertion that ongoing stress is directly related to medical challenges. Because no new information needs to be collected to support or further study this tie between stress and medical issues, this related topic did not receive detailed attention in this current study unless study participants reported specific health-related data that needed to be included as part of the qualitative results.

Expectancy-value theory

Though the expectancy-value theory is present in research and included here as an important component of this literature review, it is important to point out that expectancy-value research does not discuss this theory in relation to school administrators and their job satisfaction or perceived stress/burnout. Therefore, relating this theory to the perceptions of
elementary school principals (as this study attempted to do) constitutes an aspect of research where extremely limited exploration previously occurred.

Wigfield and Eccles (2000) examined the expectancy-value theory and evaluated the research as it pertained to two topics related to the expectancy-value theory. First, they explored “change in children’s and adolescents’ ability beliefs, expectancies for success, and subjective values” (p. 68). Secondly, they focused on “relations of children’s and adolescents’ ability-expectancy beliefs and subjective task values to their performance and choice of activities” (p. 68). According to Wigfield and Eccles, expectancy-value theory constitutes an established viewpoint that aspires to explain “people’s choice of achievement tasks, persistence on those tasks, vigor in carrying them out, and performance on them” (p. 68). Expectancy-value theorists contend that “individuals’ choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity” (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 68).

Similarly, Schunk (2008) described the fundamental construct of expectancy-value theory as the belief that “behavior depends on how much individuals value a particular outcome (goal, reinforcer) and their expectancy of attaining that outcome as a result of performing given behaviors” (p. 466). Schunk, however, clarified that individuals determine the value of a goal and their expectation of a positive result from their efforts through a process of astute discernment, as explained below:

People judge the likelihood of attaining various outcomes. They are not motivated to attempt the impossible, so they do not pursue outcomes perceived as unattainable. Even a positive outcome expectation does not produce action if the outcome is not valued. An attractive outcome, coupled with the belief that it is attainable, motivates people to act. (p. 466)
Regarding their research that investigated how expectancy-value theory applies to children and changes with maturity, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) found that “children’s and adolescents’ ability-expectancy beliefs are domain specific” (p. 74). Even with students as young as first grade, studies “indicated that children’s beliefs in each domain formed distinct factors and that each of these factors was characterized by the items measuring ability beliefs and expectancies for success in the domain” (p. 75). Assessed domains for their study included math, reading, music, and sports. Marsh, Craven, and Debus (1991) conducted similar research studies which also revealed that young students are highly self-aware and that their ability beliefs varied definitively among the differing achievement disciplines. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) emphasized that “this finding is a crucial one for the expectancy-value model. Even during the very early elementary grades, children appear to have distinct beliefs about what they are good at and what they value in different achievement domains” (p. 75). To summarize their findings as related to this subject of domain-specific ability-expectancy beliefs, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) concluded the following:

Even young children’s ability-related beliefs are differentiated clearly across various activities, although within a given activity ability beliefs and expectancies for success factor together. Different components of subjective values also have been empirically identified, especially in children in 5th grade and above. The most important implication of the work...is that early in the elementary school years certain of the constructs proposed in the model have been shown to be distinct (e.g, ability-related beliefs, subjective values). However, the ability beliefs and expectancy constructs, while theoretically distinct, are highly related empirically. (p. 75)

Intriguingly, though possibly not surprisingly, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) confirmed that “children’s ability-related beliefs and values become more negative in many ways as they get older, at least through early adolescence” (p. 77). When children do not feel that they possess skill in a particular realm, they resultanty place less value on that category of performance.
Wigfield and Eccles provided two conceivable reasons for this negativity. First, children grow in their abilities to comprehend and decipher the direct and indirect meanings within the feedback given to them as they mature, and they also utilize peer-comparison to a greater extent during adolescence. Secondly, Wigfield and Eccles suggested that the educational setting places increased value on achievement as students grow older, thus encouraging a more competitive environment for students.

In their second area of focus, the investigation of how “Children’s and Adolescents’ Ability-Related Beliefs and Subjective Task Values Predict Performance and Choice” (p. 77), Wigfield and Eccles (2000) reported two important findings:

First, even when previous performance is controlled, children’s beliefs about their ability and expectancies for success are the strongest predictors of subsequent grades in math, predicting those outcomes more strongly than either previous grades or achievement values. Second, children’s subjective task values are the strongest predictors of children’s intentions to keep taking math and actual decisions to do so. (p. 77)

Gorgesa and Kandlerb (2012) also performed research studies related to expectancy-value theory, describing that “the present study tested the applicability of expectancy-value theory to adults’ learning motivation” (p. 610). Study participants were German students who were participating in an opportunity to learn the English language. Results of their study indicated that “motivation and experiences at secondary school appear to play a crucial role in adults’ learning motivation, mediated by expectancy and value specific to the learning opportunity” (p. 610).

Relating expectancy-value theory to educators, Battle and Looney (2014) performed research in order to “explore beliefs about teaching among secondary teachers graduating from a Master’s of Education program focusing on adolescent development” (p. 373). In particular,
Battle and Looney desired to determine “whether or not there was a relation between teachers’ knowledge of development and valuing of teaching, which, according to expectancy-value theory, predict intentions; in this case, to remain in teaching” (p. 373). Specifically, Battle and Looney clarified that they “pursue this research with the hope of better understanding the reasons teachers have for remaining in the profession” (p. 373).

As it pertained to their study, Battle and Looney described that expectancy-value theory “relates achievement-related behavior and choice to several variables including self-concept of ability, expectations for success, perceptions of task difficulty and task value, and personal goals” (p. 370). In describing the results of their study, Battle and Looney stated the following:

As expectancy-value theory would predict, intrinsic-attainment (liking and importance) and utility (usefulness) task valuing of teaching were significantly, positively correlated with intentions to remain in teaching, while cost valuing (perceived psychological and financial costs) was negatively associated with those intentions. (p. 373)

Though these discussed studies do not directly address campus administrators or the impact of expectancy-value theory in their motivation and job performance, they do provide relevant research that displays a strong relationship between a child’s self-perception and future success based upon that self-perception. According to research presented here, when a child or adolescent believes that he/she is good at something, activities in that realm of strength are valued more highly than activities in which a child might believe that he/she is not skilled. Additionally, it was interesting to note that children carry these self-perceptions with them into adolescence, determining in advance whether or not they will be successful at something, based upon the self-perceptions they formulated as a young child. Since the body of educational research does not discuss a possible relationship between expectancy-value
theory and elementary principals, it is the hope that this research study has provided helpful information in this area.

District Programs to Support Principals

Numerous research studies, as explored thus far, revealed that a myriad of challenges in the principal role frequently contribute to chronic stress and burnout. Thus, some school districts have implemented programs specifically designed to support principals in their job role. Superintendent Duarte, in the Oxnard School District, convinced his school board to allocate an additional administrator (designated as a co-administrator) to each elementary campus with at least 900 enrolled students in order to provide support for current principals and to mitigate their intense work load. Oxnard operated a year-round school system and noted a consistent pattern of growth in its student population during a period of several years (Adams, 1999). Further action to relieve elementary principals included the approval of three new administrative internships for the 1999-2000 academic year, “assuring additional administrative support now for nine of the district’s 14 elementary schools, several of which house more than 1,000 students” (“Recognizing the Need for Relief” section, para. 2). Duarte reported “that board members readily recognized that concern for the safety of students and staff, quality of programs, supervision and adequate time to address needs of the district’s families and community warranted the expenditure for new management personnel” (para. 2).

While numerous districts similarly pursued the creation of additional administrative staffing positions to assist in relieving principal work load, some districts did not possess funding for these additional positions. Adams (1999) presented an option that one district implemented as a tangible way to recognize the time and hard work consistently invested by
elementary principals who may not have a co-administrator or vice-principal to share any of the burden. Superintendent Gwen Gross of the Ojai Unified School District realizes that building administrators shoulder an immense work load, but her district’s budget will not allow her to provide additional administrative personnel for elementary campuses. Superintendent Gross, however, found a creative solution to the problem. Adams described that “instead, she has established a fund that allocates ‘principal support money’ each year to elementary principals. Principals of schools of 550 or more students receive an extra $10,000 annually; those with fewer students receive $5,000” ("Breathing Space for Principals” section, para. 4). Adams also gave this important clarification:

> Principals can spend these discretionary funds in any manner that will support them and their practice. Ojai site administrators have used their accounts to release or compensate teachers for facilitating school-based projects, initiating and implementing programs, developing curriculum and shepherding the work of task forces. (para. 5)

Cohen (1989) agreed with the need to provide assistance to principals and stated that “cognitive restructuring is advocated as an effective, permanent approach, in which the individual changes patterns of thinking about stressful situations” (p. 1). His research described several possible strategies for the reduction of principal stress, including “acquiring needed skills, anticipating and preparing for problem situations, utilizing relaxation techniques, exercising, maintaining a reasonable workload, seeking group support, and confronting perceived stresses” (p. 1).

As detailed in this portion of the literature review, many districts are beginning to recognize principals’ struggle with burnout and are validating the significance of this issue by attempting to alleviate chronic stress that they have attributed to role overload. The fact that some districts are now allocating funding for additional administrative positions at large, or at
high need elementary campuses, is a definite move in the right direction. However, it may not be enough since this solution only addresses one of the numerous stress-causing factors reported by principals, as listed in the first portion of this literature review.

Peer Interaction as a Support Strategy

Colgan (2003) found, as part of his research study, that providing opportunities for principals to interact with others in similar roles helped in preventing or delaying the onset of burnout. Along those same lines, Stephenson and Bauer (2010) claimed that “professional isolation has hampered the quality of the work experience for employees in and outside public education for decades” (p. 1). Thus, they described their research study and results as follows:

The analysis tests whether isolation serves as a mediator in the relationship between factors that are known to affect quality of work life of principals (social support, role stress, and participation in a structured coaching relationship) and three dimensions of burnout. Regression analysis supports the framework that places isolation as a mediator in predicting physical and emotional burnout, but it does not support this role for cognitive burnout. (p. 1)

According to Izgar’s research (2009), principal loneliness and depression are statistically related. However, it is important to note that research on this topic is limited, and it does not seem that enough studies have been conducted to make any type of conclusive statement on this topic. Stephenson and Bauer (2010) recommended further research on this topic, stating that the findings of their study spawned intriguing new questions for both researchers and those currently working in the practical field of educational administration. Specifically, Stephenson and Bauer asserted that, “based on these analyses, it appears that reducing new principal burnout should involve attending to issues related to role overload and social support, which directly impact all three types of burnout and isolation” (p. 13). Stephenson and Bauer summarized their research by stating the following:
First, this study recognizes and validates the idea that isolation exists in the lives of new principals as a complicated variable that impacts and is impacted by other work environment factors, and it provides some support for the treatment of isolation as a mediator. Second, this research shows that isolation significantly impacts physical and emotional burnout, important outcomes of the quality of work life of new principals, which gives researchers a clear rationale for future examination of this issue in relation to other factors associated with quality of work life and additional work outcomes, such as job satisfaction or intent to leave. (p. 14)

As emphasized by Stephenson and Bauer (2010, the relationship between role isolation and principal burnout constitutes a facet of principal stress research in which further investigation is needed. Many districts, including ones in which this current study was conducted, provide consistent opportunities for principals to meet with other campus administrators throughout the district. These gatherings can conceivably promote professional collaboration and the exchange of ideas. Furthermore, these collaborative opportunities enable principals to also have a sounding board and safe place for articulating concerns and finding solutions to specific campus struggles.

Strategies for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

Focusing on a slightly different avenue for stress reduction, Hawkins (2008) launched a study that analyzed the use of humor in helping to alleviate stress for school principals. Based upon his description:

This study compared the use of humor to other coping mechanisms in relation to Maslach’s theory of burnout. Data were analyzed to determine statistically significant relationships among humor dimensions, other coping mechanisms, and public elementary school principals’ level of burnout. (p. 1)

Hawkins further upheld that “humor can be used as a form of communication in organizations to promote cohesiveness, build consensus, deliver messages across power and authority, make situations less threatening, and promote change” (p. 1). The results of Hawkins’ study
supported that one specific type of humor did function as a powerful “coping mechanism” (p. 1) while three other humor strategies did not. Hawkins defined and distinguished the four types of humor as follows:

Self-Enhancing Humor is associated with having a humorous outlook on life, showing amusement to incongruities in life and using humor as a coping mechanism, and was supported by this study as an effective coping mechanism. The dimension of Affiliative Humor is associated with making funny comments and telling jokes which facilitate relationships while reducing tension among others, and was not supported by this study as an effective coping mechanism. The dimension of Aggressive Humor is related to the use of humor to show superiority over others by ridicule, put-downs, and disparagement, and was not supported by this study as an effective coping mechanism. The dimension of Self-Defeating Humor is identified with the use of humor at an individual’s own expense through excessive humorous self-ridicule, and was not supported by this study as an effective coping mechanism. (p. 1)

Though this topic is related to this current study because of its focus on utilizing humor as a stress-reducing strategy, the use of humor for stress reduction does not represent an area that has received a significant amount of focus or priority from previous researchers, and it did not constitute an arena of particular importance with regard to this current study.

Delegation and self-awareness also constitute strategies for stress reduction and burnout prevention. According to Kise and Russell (2009), “as the demands on school leaders expand, it’s becoming more and more important to lead from one’s strengths” (p. 36). These two researchers identified 26 distinct jobs for campus administrators that influence pupil achievement, and they urged practitioners to delegate responsibilities so that they are able to avoid the fast track to burnout. Furthermore, principals need to know themselves so that their self-awareness enables them to utilize their own strengths and style to their fullest potential while also empowering others to come alongside them as they work together towards a
common goal. In essence, “this [personality type] theory can help one move from the old Lone Ranger mentality to sharing leadership in an effective, efficient way” (p. 36).

Use of delegation as a leadership strategy has proven to be effective for numerous elementary campus principals (Chen, 2007; Eggen, 2010; Farnsworth, 2014). It is commonly advised that one should hire well, surrounding himself or herself with those who have strengths in one’s own areas of weakness so that an administrative team is able to operate with optimal effectiveness and efficiency. As detailed in Chapter 4, delegation proved to be an area of strength and a consistently utilized strategy for some of the principals who participated in this qualitative research study.

Boyland (2011) upheld that numerous stress management strategies have also helped principals to alleviate the physical manifestations of stress and burnout. The following 20 specific strategies for effective stress management, as stated by Boyland, were self-reported by practicing principals across Indiana as ones that proved to be particularly beneficial.

1. Regular exercise (this was the number one strategy principals reported as helpful).

2. Try to leave your work at work.

3. Take time to eat during the day.

4. Don’t dwell on your mistakes.

5. Journaling.

6. Get out of the office and go be with the kids.

7. Network with others.

8. Play relaxing or inspirational music.

9. Increase your daily levels of communication.
10. Write out tomorrow’s “to do” list before you leave each day.

11. Look at the big picture.

12. Don’t make snap decisions (unless it is an emergency).

13. Don’t take it personally.


15. Be optimistic.

16. Hire good staff.

17. Balance your life.

18. Identify something you really enjoy that is healthy and positive for you.


20. Get organized. (Boyland, 2011, p. 9)

Alternative Views Regarding Principal and Stress

During the preparation for this literature review, one journal article was found that entirely disagreed with the wealth of educational research on the topic of principal burnout. This article proved quite intriguing, simply due to the fact that it was the only opinion located in which the author did not believe that chronic stress is an issue worthy of discussion, research, and solutions. Interestingly, Milstein (1992) stated:

Research findings strongly contradict the assumption of high administrator stress. In reality, most administrators, including principals and superintendents, view their work situations as normal and manageable. Administrators who persist the longest are found in central office roles, where the pace is not so frenetic. The chief stressor is stagnation; ‘plateauing’ educators are experiencing rustout, not burnout. (p. 1)

Milstein’s perspective on principal burnout definitely stands in contrast to numerous other researchers’ views as previously presented in this chapter. While most studies reviewed in this
chapter focused on the concern of principal burnout, it is also important to highlight research in which principals have identified positive facets of their job role.

Positive Aspects of the Principal Role

While the reported negatives that frequently serve as catalysts for burnout and heightened stress levels have received a lot of focus in recent educational research, practicing principals also report positive aspects of their job role. These positive factors include the opportunity to guide staff towards a common vision, making a difference in the lives of students, bringing about positive change, collaborating with others, serving in the community, and overseeing an effectively operated organization (Boyland, 2011). Furthermore, Boyland found that principals have not been attracted to their position by common lures such as increased salary, benefits or position status. Instead, Boyland emphasized that “the main factors that appear to be drawing people to the principalship are altruistic in nature, that being the opportunity to serve others, to be a change agent, and to make a positive difference for children” (2011). Cushing et al. (2003) similarly reported that campus administrators find immense value in performing their duties well and watching students excel. Based upon this abundance of research, Boyland (2011) issued this summative statement:

Therefore, it is important to recognize that even though research indicates that the demands on principals are increasing, it appears that many principals still believe that the position is rewarding, primarily because of their interest in helping others. However, when an individual faces intense job-related stress for long periods of time, even the most rewarding position can become unmanageable and undesirable. Consequently, further research is needed in order to investigate principals’ current levels of job-related stress and examine factors that may promote the health and retention of quality individuals in this critically important leadership role. (p. 3)
Value of the Principal

Though a principal’s job has been described as “unrelenting” (Combs et al., 2009, p. 14), due to all of the factors that were previously articulated within this literature review, it is important to note as well that a large amount of educational research supports the assertion that effective campus administrators do make a significant impact as related to student achievement, success of staff members, parent involvement at school and campus goal mastery (Boyland, 2011). Dhuey and Smith (2014), whose research study sought to determine the importance of the campus principal’s role in helping students to attain their academic goals, cited the following: “Our results imply that isolating the most effective principals and allocating them accordingly between schools can have a significant positive effect on reducing achievement gaps” (p. 1). According to Rammer (2007), “literature suggests that a principal plays a critical role in any successful school” (p. 68). Rammer also stated that “in a successful school, one will find a successful principal, and a school that does not have a principal with leadership skills will flounder” (p. 68). Similarly, Kaplan, Owings and Nunnery (2005) provided the lofty assertion that “two decades of school effectiveness research reliably conclude that successful schools invariably have dynamic, knowledgeable, and focused leaders” (p. 28). Taking it even a step further, Larsen (1989) advocated that an effective, successful principal constituted the only variable that was consistently paramount and fundamental in order for a school to reach the status of high-achieving.

Bryk’s (2010) research supported the assertion that the campus principal’s contributions play a critical role in the ultimate success of a school. Consequently, Bryk contended that
“improving elementary schools requires coherent, orchestrated action across five essential supports” (p. 23). Those five supports included:

1. Coherent instructional guidance system
2. Professional capacity
3. Strong parent-community-school ties
4. Student-centered learning climate
5. Leadership drives change (pp. 24-25).

Though an effective principal makes a positive impact in all five of these support areas, Bryk most specifically described the importance of the principal’s role in the last of his five supports, “leadership drives change” (p. 25). Bryk elaborated on the essential responsibilities of effective principals by stating the following:

Principals in improving schools engage in a dynamic interplay of instructional and inclusive-facilitative leadership. On the instructional side, school leaders influence local activity around core instructional programs, supplemental academic and social supports, and the hiring and development of staff. They establish strategic priorities for using resources and buffer externalities that might distract from coherent reform. Working in tandem with this, principals build relationships across the school community. Improving teaching and learning places demands on these relationships. In carrying out their daily activities, school leaders advance instrumental objectives while also trying to enlist teachers in the change effort. In the process, principals cultivate a growing cadre of leaders (teachers, parents, and community members) who can help expand the reach of this work and share overall responsibility for improvement. (p. 25)

Clearly, the role of an effective principal is broad and all-encompassing. Based upon the research data presented here, the principal’s role in the establishment and maintenance of an effective campus is highly valuable.
Summary

This chapter comprised a review of literature associated with the concept of principal burnout, focusing first on identified stressors and challenges of the administrative role, as well as the impact of specific factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and tenure on principal burnout. Next, this review considered the relationship between ongoing stress and medical issues. Research regarding expectancy-value theory was also explored, along with district initiatives designed as support provisions for principals as they deal with stressful situations that constitute a prevalent portion of their role. Lastly, alternative views of principal burnout and positive aspects of the principal role were investigated.

In closing, Boyland’s (2010) desire for further study regarding the stress of the principalship articulated one of the primary functions of this research study. Identification of the key factors that play the most significant role in causing stress and resultant principal burnout will certainly constitute vital information for constructing effective support systems for these campus administrators so that great leaders do not continue to leave this monumentally critical profession of educating the next generation of future leaders.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This methodology chapter outlines the research design and procedures that I utilized in conducting this study. Thus, this methodology chapter is organized to include detailed sections pertaining to research design, participants, instrumentation (survey and interview protocols), data collection procedures, data analysis, limitations and a brief summary.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design, comprehensively analyzing the professional journey of eight elementary principals in suburban school districts within north Texas who experienced similar professional preparation prior to receiving their first principalship. Moreover, this qualitative study was designed to examine the current status of elementary principals’ perceptions regarding their level of stress and burnout, identify causes for the stress, and investigate principals’ suggestions by which stress might be alleviated. This study also analyzed the extent to which future role expectations are related to the chronic stress and feelings of burnout that elementary principals perceive. Specifically, this study addressed the following four research questions:

1. What are elementary principals’ perceptions about the causes of their stress?
2. What are elementary principals’ perceptions about their level of stress?
3. To what extent are future role expectations (expectancy-value theory) related to the ongoing stress that elementary principals perceive?
4. What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding ways to address their stress and its causes?

This qualitative research study was based upon phenomenology, the strategy of inquiry defined as an approach that “focuses on people’s experience from their perspective” (Roberts, 2010, p. 143). Phenomenological research is also characterized as a scenario in which the researcher determines the substance or basis of “human experiences concerning a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15), as depicted by research participants. As previously stated, it was the purpose of this research study to fully scrutinize the professional journey of eight participants in order to deeply understand their feelings and experiences regarding chronic, work-related stress and burnout. This quest to comprehend the thoughts, experiences, and emotions of these individuals “marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method,” according to Creswell (2003, p. 15), and thus justified its employment as the qualitative method of this research study.

Use of this phenomenological strategy of inquiry definitively shaped the types of questions posed to research participants, particularly during the interview (see Data Collection Procedures section of this chapter). Utilization of the phenomenological approach created a semi-structured interview setting in which open-ended questions were incorporated. In order to gain a full understanding of participants’ perspectives as they pertained to the research questions of this study, it was necessary for participants to be granted the opportunity for elaboration and expansion as they responded to open-ended questioning. This approach to questioning is supported by Creswell’s (2003) description of phenomenological research, in which he stated that “the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through
extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning” (p. 15). Taking it even a step further, Creswell expressed that “the inquirer [is] typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (p. 184).

Participants

Eight participants were carefully identified through the qualitative procedure of purposeful sampling. When utilized in qualitative research, purposeful sampling is defined by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) as “a group of cases that are likely to be ‘information-rich’ with respect to the purposes of a qualitative research study” (p. 633). Within the realm of purposeful sampling, as defined above, this research study used the type of purposeful sampling designated as criterion sampling. According to Gall et al., criterion sampling “involves the selection of cases that satisfy an important criterion” (p. 179). The specific criteria to be satisfied for participation in this research study were as follows:

1. Current elementary principals
2. From large north Texas school districts
3. Have all held at least one educational role within that same district prior to the acceptance of their first principalship position
   (Other educational roles might include paraprofessional positions, teacher, counselor, curriculum specialist and assistant principal.)
4. Have all received similar professional preparation through an accredited, university-based approach

The websites of four targeted school districts were analyzed to determine which elementary principals met the criteria established above.
Data Collection Procedures

Creswell (2003) described the qualitative researcher’s role by stating that “the researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data” (p. 18). According to Creswell, the criteria for data collection include “setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured (or semi-structured) observations . . . as well as establishing the protocol for recording information” (p. 185). Each of these steps of the data collection process will be explored within this section.

Importantly, UNT Institutional Review Board approval was received before data collection for this study began. Once study approval had been obtained, prospective participants were contacted by phone and/or e-mail in order to ascertain their interest in and willingness to participate in the study. Following the informal acquisition of verbal or written interest in study participation, an IRB-approved recruitment letter was electronically sent to selected participants, formally requesting their participation in this research study. The letter fully described this study and ensured that participation would be protected and not revealed. Besides signing this recruitment letter, all participants also signed the IRB-approved informed consent form prior to their participation in this research study.

As stated earlier, criterion sampling was the type of purposeful sampling strategy utilized in this research study. In order to ensure that research participants met the criteria of the purposive sampling, a survey (Appendix A) was first administered to those who had been identified as potential participants through criterion sampling. The survey included short-answer questions that primarily focused on demographic and background information. All
information from the survey was recorded in Microsoft Word and categorized so that emerging commonalities and response themes among participants would be discernible.

Once eight research participants who met the criteria of the specified criterion sampling for this study had been identified through survey participation and the survey analysis process, I conducted an in-depth interview with each of the eight research participants. All interviews were conducted at off-campus locations selected by the research participants. An interview script (Appendix B) was used during each interview in order to ensure consistency throughout the administration of all eight interviews.

In keeping with the phenomenological approach of this study, the interview protocol utilized open-ended questioning strategies that allowed each participant to speak freely about the factors that most significantly contribute to their feelings of chronic stress and burnout. Creswell (2003) supported this qualitative questioning approach by stating that “these interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 188). Once the contributing stress factors and levels of stress had been identified, questions focused on the extent to which future role expectations are related to stress, and perceptions regarding ways to alleviate stress. Questions were provided to each participant in advance, via e-mail, so that these individuals quickly would feel comfortable with the process and have the opportunity to prepare thoughts in advance. For the purpose of consistency, which constitutes a crucial component as data are collected, I utilized the same questions and questioning strategies in all participant interviews. Moreover, this consistency of questioning ensured that the data-
collection process was equitable among participants so that study results would be as accurate as possible.

All interviews were conducted individually and in person (not via telephone or through electronic means). Miles and Huberman (1994) advocated that data gathered during individual interviews proves to be more useful and informative than data collected during group interview sessions. Understandably, individuals are frequently more comfortable with giving information and personal perspective in an informal, one-on-one setting and often reveal details in this setting that might not have been released in the presence of a larger group. As each interview commenced, I worked to establish trust with the participant, prior to posing any interview questions, by intentionally engaging the participant in informal conversation, sharing basic information about myself, and explaining the central premise of this research study. Additionally, I created a comfortable interview environment by observing business casual dress. A foundation of trust is critically important in order for participants to feel comfortable in providing genuine and comprehensive responses to questions that might be viewed by some participants as delicate in nature. These trust-building techniques and environmental considerations are supported by Creswell (2003), who advocated that:

> Qualitative research uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic. The methods of data collection are growing, and they increasingly involve active participation by participants and sensitivity to the participants in the study. Qualitative researchers look for involvement of their participants in data collection and seek to build rapport and credibility with the individuals in the study. (p. 181)

Interviews were audio-recorded (with participant permission gained in writing prior to the interview) and analyzed. Then, all verbal data were transcribed into Microsoft Word for storage, interpretation and reporting purposes. All collected data were stored on the
researcher’s password-secured laptop. Upon completion of the study, all data that could potentially identify participants will be transferred to a flash drive. This flash drive will then be stored in a locked cabinet within the Department of Teacher Education and Administration at the University of North Texas for three years, in accordance with federal regulations and Institutional Review Board policy. Once these data have been transferred to the flash drive, they will be permanently removed from the researcher’s laptop, and any paper data through which participants might be identified will be shredded. Likewise, all audio recordings will be completely destroyed once analysis is complete. By utilizing qualitative methods to analyze the interviews with individual principals, the results yielded practical data to conceivably inform the professional development, collaborative opportunities and preparatory experiences for principals within this north Texas area.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study utilized naturalistic inquiry, meaning that I examined perceptions and descriptions as provided by participants, rather than focusing on quantitative data. Roberts (2010) depicted this naturalistic design as research that “is conducted in real-world settings; no attempt is made to manipulate the environment. Researchers are interested in the meanings people attach to the activities and events in their world and are open to whatever emerges” (p. 143). Moreover, a study that employs naturalistic inquiry is characterized by the fact that meaning and themes emerge as data are analyzed. Consequently, this descriptive study made use of inductive analysis, a process through which hypotheses were formulated as data were analyzed (Roberts, 2010). Creswell (2003) declared that qualitative research in general is “emergent rather than tightly prefigured” (p. 181) and also clarified that “the theory
or general pattern of understanding will emerge as it begins with initial codes, develops into broad themes, and coalesces into a grounded theory or broad interpretation” (p. 182).

Furthermore, Creswell (2003) appropriately stated that, “one cannot escape the personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis” (p. 182). Moreover, he gave the following detailed description of the qualitative researcher’s role during the data analysis process:

The researcher makes an interpretation of the data. This includes developing a description of an individual or setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically, stating the lessons learned, and offering further questions to be asked. (p. 182)

According to Creswell, qualitative data analysis includes several critical elements. Importantly, he emphasized that qualitative researchers need to incorporate the following fundamental steps as they analyze data:

The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. (p. 190)

As these depictions of qualitative data analysis were applied to this specific study, it is imperative to mention that data analysis, in this particular study, was adapted to meet the needs of the phenomenological research strategy utilized. Creswell clarified that phenomenological research typically “uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of an ‘essence’ description” (p. 191).

Keeping Creswell’s (2003) outline for qualitative data analysis in mind, the first step for data analysis in this study was to “organize and prepare” the collected information (p. 191). Once each interview concluded, the session was transcribed in its entirety from the audio
recording into an electronic Microsoft Word document. After the initial step, I carefully reviewed all of the transcribed data in order to gain a broad understanding of the material and to determine its general implications. The next step was to employ a coding process as detailed analysis occurred. Put simply, coding is the procedure through which information is organized and placed into sections. Creswell further explained that coding “involves taking text data or pictures, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant (called an *in vivo* term)” (p. 192).

Following the employment of a coding process, I utilized the process of coding to determine categories or themes for further investigation. These generated themes constituted significant findings and therefore were included in the findings section of this research study (see Chapter 5). Then, I focused on presenting the categories and themes, thus giving readers an understanding of what the data analysis revealed. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), charts, tables and/or graphs represent an effective means for providing clarity and value during the step of qualitative analysis. Thus, the meaningful data in each Word document were placed in tables, so that items were able to be categorized once themes emerged during analysis. The complete transcription of each interview was maintained in Word throughout the analysis process, in order to further examine the data details and cross-check the spreadsheet with the original data as necessary. By referring to the original data as needed, I was able to ensure accuracy of the information. The Word transcriptions also enabled me to utilize personal quotes from interviewees in order to enhance and/or clarify any research findings. The final step in qualitative data analysis occurs when meaning is assigned to the data. In other words,
the data were interpreted during this final step and compared with findings from prior research studies. Questions that emerged from the data were also brought forth as suggestions for future study.

Lastly, it is of paramount importance to mention that I validated the credibility of all findings that resulted from this described data analysis. In fact, this validation of findings constituted an ongoing process throughout all of the stages of the qualitative analysis. The validation plan for this study included the utilization of a second reader, a process described by Creswell (2003) as “peer debriefing” (p. 196), in order to verify the analysis. This second reader read the interview transcriptions, as well as reviewed the data analysis, and asked clarifying questions if needed for understanding. Use of this second reader not only served to validate the analysis, but it ensured that the explanation of findings was accessible to an audience beyond the researcher.

Limitations

Small sample size constituted the central limitation of this research study. Eight elementary principals from four suburban school districts within north Texas who experienced similar professional preparation prior to receiving their first principalship were selected for this qualitative study. The phenomenological approach to this qualitative study, as explained earlier in this chapter, involves the extensive study of a small number of subjects with the goal of discovering patterns and relationships. While the results of this study provide a deeper understanding of these eight elementary principals’ perceptions regarding stress, utilization of a small sample size constitutes a limitation in qualitative research because more data are
needed in order to determine if the findings of this study are able to be generalized to a larger population of elementary principals in north Texas.

Summary

The research design was described above, in Chapter 3. The research design was qualitative in nature, based upon phenomenology and utilizing naturalistic design, purposive sampling, and inductive analysis. Eight participants with similar preparatory experiences were selected from suburban north Texas school districts. These eight participants all previously held another educational role in the same district prior to receipt of their first elementary principalship position. Data were collected through the use of both survey and interview instruments. Subsequently, interviews were recorded and inductively analyzed with data being stored and organized in Microsoft Word so that it was able to be compared, sorted, categorized and accurately reported.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, this qualitative study examined the current status of elementary principals’ perceptions regarding their level of stress and burnout, identified causes for the stress, and investigated principals’ suggestions by which stress might be alleviated. This study also analyzed the extent to which future role expectations are related to the chronic stress and feelings of burnout that elementary principals perceive. The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of this qualitative study, including a description of the participants and analysis of the data collected. The results are presented as they specifically relate to each of the following four research questions:

1. What are elementary principals’ perceptions about the causes of their stress?
2. What are elementary principals’ perceptions about their level of stress?
3. To what extent are future role expectations (expectancy-Value Theory) related to the ongoing stress the elementary principals perceive?
4. What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding ways to address their stress and its causes?

Participants

As explained in Chapter 3, eight participants were carefully identified through the qualitative process of criterion sampling. The specific criteria to be satisfied for participation in this research study were as follow:
1. Current elementary principals
2. From large north Texas school districts
3. Have all held at least one educational role within that same district prior to the acceptance of their first principalship position
4. Have all received similar professional preparation through an accredited, university-based approach

Additionally, the websites of four targeted school districts were analyzed to determine which elementary principals met the criteria established above.

Table 1 provides important demographic information regarding each research participant. As the following sections of this chapter will explain in detail, these demographic factors played a significant role in shaping the perceptions of participants as they reflected on stress as related to their principalship role. Furthermore, the variance in this demographic data enhanced the variety of perspectives that were gained during the one-on-one interview with each research participant.

A pseudonym was assigned to each research participant in order to maintain confidentiality. These pseudonyms are reflected in Table 1 and utilized in all specific references to individual research participants. Regarding years of principal experience at the time of this study, participants ranged from first-year principals to those with at least a decade of experience in the elementary principal position.
Table 1

Demographic Data Regarding Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th># of Years in Admin Role before Principalship</th>
<th>Age at First Principalship</th>
<th>Roles Prior to Principalship In District</th>
<th>Years As Elementary Principal</th>
<th>Campus Size</th>
<th>Percent of Campus Low SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>AP, Teacher</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>AP, Teacher, Instructional Coach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>AP, Teacher, Counselor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>AP, Teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>AP, Teacher, Bilingual Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>AP, Teacher, SPED &amp; PE Assistant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>AP, Teacher</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>AP, Teacher, Instructional Coach</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. AP = assistant principal; SPED = special education; PE = physical education.
While holding at least one educational role within their current district prior to accepting a principalship position constituted a requirement for participation in this research study, it is interesting to note that all participants held two or more roles prior to their promotion into a principalship position. Moreover, all eight participants served as both teachers and assistant principals prior to promotion in their current district. Only one of the participants entered his current district in a paraprofessional role.

Research participants ranged in age from 30 to 55 at the time they received their first principalship position, and their years of administrative preparation prior to becoming a principal varied between 2 and 8.5. All but one of the research participants mentioned attending a specific leadership academy offered by their district for the purpose of preparing individuals to become campus administrators. Lastly, it is important to note that disparity of campus sizes and varying percentages of low SES population serve as critical points of distinction among the research participants.

Research Question 1

The first research question focused on elementary principals’ perceptions regarding the causes of their stress. The interview included six questions for the purpose of gleaning information about the causes of principal stress. (See Appendix B for the full interview script.) The first five questions asked participants about stress in specific aspects of the principal role. Those five aspects were as follows:

- Type of school
- Students
- Parents and community
• Staff

• Supervisors and central office administration (district personnel)

The last of the six questions provided an opportunity for principals to identify and discuss any additional causes of principal stress that did not fit into the five categories previously named.

Table 2 shows the individual responses of participants to the first question. Regarding campus type, 75% of participants identified that a high percentage of low SES population constitutes a significant stress factor for the building administrator. Thus, figuring out how to meet the needs of these low SES families was the most commonly discussed stress factor in the category of school type. These participants talked throughout the interview about several factors related to low SES population, such as the following: high mobility rate, refugees, poverty challenges, and dealing with academic gaps that are largest for students who do not come to school with background academic knowledge that is commensurate with their higher SES peers.

Importantly, the six principals who perceived that a large population of low SES students contributes significantly to an administrator’s stress level serve at campuses with higher percentages of low SES families than those participants who did not identify low SES population as a stress factor. With the exception of Art, those participants who named low SES population as a cause of stress work at campuses where 38-95% of families meet low SES criteria. In the case of Art, he shared during his interview that he served at Title I campuses with high percentages of low SES families during his years as an assistant principal.
Table 2

*Causes of Stress Related to School Type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Art         | - Large campus size  
              - High percentage of low SES population |
| Betty       | - High percentage of ELLs  
              - High mobility rate  
              - High refugee population  
              - High percentage of low SES population  
              - Challenge of gaining and maintaining the trust of homeowners (high SES population) |
| Chris       | - High percentage of low SES population  
              - Increasing state testing standards  
              - High percentage of ELLs |
| Donna       | - Parents who are educated about the school system, but want to criticize rather than help |
| Ellie       | - High percentage of low SES population  
              - Poverty challenges  
              - High percentage of ELLs |
| Fred        | - High percentage of low SES population  
              - Stress always present at any type of school  
              - Different kinds of stress depending on school type (ex: stress caused by parent expectations at a high-achieving campus without the low SES population) |
| Gail        | - Greatest amount of stress internally placed by principal, rather than caused by external factors |
| Henry       | - Extremes - high percentage of low SES or high SES families |

*Note. SES = socio-economic status; ELL = English language learners.*

Thirty-eight percent of participants identified that a substantial ELL population causes abundant stress for the campus principal because these students have considerable language and academic needs that extend far beyond what a teacher with 22 students in her classroom is able to adequately provide throughout the school day. These three principals possess the largest campus percentages of low SES population (62-95%) when compared to the rest of the research participants (2-55%). Conversely, 50% of participants mentioned that a high SES
population serves as a source of sizable stress for principals. Typically, participants talked primarily about the challenge of the parents, and not the students, when discussing the stress related to a high SES population.

The second question asked for participants to identify the most significant causes of stress related to students (see Table 3). Overwhelmingly, participants passionately discussed the heightened stress they feel due to student factors that are outside the school’s control.

Table 3

*Causes of Stress Related to Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Art         | • Frustrating circumstances when principals do not know what to do to help, support, or give a student what he/she needs  
• Process of determining the most effective interventions for students who struggle academically  
• Students who experience overwhelming home struggles to the point that it impacts their academic performance at school - and feeling powerless to help them |
| Betty       | • Students who have huge emotional needs - CPS dealings, refugee issues, and safety issues all have to be resolved before learning can begin  
• Significant special education students with behavioral needs |
| Chris       | • Finding ways to close the learning gaps |
| Donna       | • Children who have parents who do not care, will not meet, too busy to help |
| Ellie       | • Factors that the school cannot control, such as economic background  
• Bad family situations - living in poverty, little support for the child due to parents working so much |
| Fred        | • Trying to figure out how to instill a love and desire for learning in students who are not motivated |
| Gail        | • The growing amount of health and academic needs that students possess |
| Henry       | • Home life – worry about students’ well-being and things the school cannot control |
These student factors that participants felt powerless to change included references to the following: overwhelming home struggles, emotional needs, CPS concerns, refugee issues, uncaring or preoccupied parents, poverty, and health difficulties. Art expressed his concerns and stress related to students by stating the following:

The thing that is hardest for me is when I don’t know what to do to help kids. When I don’t know how to turn them around. When I don’t know how to support them and give them what they need. When I don’t have the answers to give them. . . . And sometimes, what is going on outside of school for them is so big and so much that we can’t impact it. It’s so pervasive that it impacts their ability to be at school. And so that is the hardest thing, that’s the thing that keeps me up at night and bothers me a lot.

Similarly, Ellie provided the following detailed description of her stress as related to students:

I think that economic background and family situations, those factors that you can’t control, are some of the most stressful things. Because I know that’s where the needs come from. You want to do as much as you can while they are in the environment of the school to impact the most change. But you can’t change those bad family situations or parents who have to work so much that they can’t really support their children. Or the poverty that they come from. And so for me, that is stressful because you want to help them. But you can’t help in that way, so it just makes it all the more important what you do at school. And you just think – I have to do everything that I can because I can’t control where they go home to at the end of the day. I want them to have better lives, I want them to have a better future, so you just feel that weight. At least I do. And, I know that my teachers feel the same way.

While factors beyond the school’s control were mentioned by 75% of participants, 38% of the responses included references to academic struggles, learning gaps, or academic needs as a source of significant principal stress. Less common responses included one reference to special education students with behavioral needs and one reference to the challenge of finding ways to instill a love and desire for learning in students who are not motivated.

Table 4 displays the results from the third question that pertained to participant perceptions regarding causes of stress related to parents and the community. Fifty percent of
participants conveyed that adversarial relationships account for the majority of their parent and community stress.

Table 4

*Causes of Stress Related to Parents and Community*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Art         | • Circumstances where a partnership (between school and home) does not exist, and instead it feels like an adversarial relationship  
  • Situations where parents are not willing to hear the school’s input regarding their child or refuse assistance that the school wants to provide  
  • Parents who believe that the school is criticizing them, instead of understanding that school personnel are doing everything they can to help children to be successful |
| Betty       | • Communication challenges with Burmese refugees  
  • Finding Chin translators  
  • Parents who cannot attend school meetings due to working two jobs  
  • Building trust and relationships with homeowner community (particularly those with pre-K students) through communication and invitations to special campus events |
| Chris       | • Helping parents to understand the educational laws and standards that govern school practices and procedures |
| Donna       | • Parents who place too much pressure on their children  
  • Parents who are too busy to help their children when they need it |
| Ellie       | • Communication with parents regarding low campus scores on state tests  
  • Working families who do not have time for school meetings  
  • Cultural and language barriers |
| Fred        | • Parents who are unrealistic about what a teacher with 22 children in her class is able to individually provide for their student  
  • Parents who enable and cover for their child, rather than expecting him/her to meet the school’s expectations |
| Gail        | • Parents who choose to blame the school for their child’s problems, refusing to acknowledge any home factors that might be contributing to their child’s struggles |
| Henry       | • Uninvolved parents who do not seem to care about their child’s education  
  • Helicopter parents who question everything the school does |

Chris depicted this antagonism between the school and parent community in the following statement:
With parents and community, it’s trying to help them understand why we do what we do. Why we have the particular rules and procedures in place. Because they are not privy to our training. They are not privy to all the standards that we have to make sure that we are meeting. Academically, they are not privy to all of the laws in education. So a lot of the time, you may come across as being unfair when you are actually doing your job – you are following what you know you need to do. And it’s stressful helping them understanding that at times.

Art voiced that his challenges with parents come “when we’re not on the same page, or they think that we’re out to get them. Sometimes we have to share some hard things with parents, and they hear that as attacking their kid.” Comparatively, Gail explained that many parents do not want to accept any ownership for their children’s academic progress and behavioral choices. Instead, they desire to believe that “it’s the school problem more than the home problem.” She further stated that “they blame the teachers, the schools, and the procedures you have in place. You know you are doing the best you can, no matter what. If something happens, however, it’s on your watch. It’s just a high responsibility.” Moreover, Fred specified that his stress in this area comes from “parents who are just so persistent about things that really, in my opinion, they should back off on.” He clarified, however, that he really does “enjoy parents who are advocates for their children when they truly have a reason to be advocates for their children.”

These accounts from Chris, Art, Gail, and Fred revealed a critical link between the relationship that parents have with the school and the communication that the school provides. In fact, several participants recognized that parental and community education plays a vital role in building positive relationships between these constituencies and school personnel. For example, Betty elaborated on the struggle to inform and educate her refugee parent community by asserting the following:
I think bridging the gap and bringing people together has been a challenge. I think with my Burmese refugees, communication is definitely hard for them. They are so invested, and they will come to anything. They will sign anything we give them. Their kids are great translators for us. So, if we ask for them to come to Curriculum Night, they’ll bring their parents, and they are happy to come. And they’re learning so much along the way with their kids for sure, but it’s just that communication piece that still is our biggest barrier.

Betty also spoke about the challenge of securing available Chin translators for her Burmese community. Additionally, she articulated that consistent communication is difficult with parents who are working multiple jobs to pay the bills and put food on the table. These parents, who comprise a large number at her Title I campus, are not able to take off from work for parent-teacher conferences and school events. In contrast, Betty mentioned that building trust and relationships with her homeowner community (high SES population) is just as important as her efforts with the low SES population. By consistently communicating with the families of pre-kindergarten students and inviting them to school events, for instance, Betty is investing in future families. As a result of her proactive communication efforts, Betty is hoping that these parents will elect to bring their kindergartners to her elementary campus and begin the educational journey with a positive impression of the school and staff.

Regarding other causes of stress related to the parental community, Ellie discussed the challenge of communicating with parents about campus scores on state assessments, particularly when the scores are low, and parents may not have an understanding of the scoring system. Uninvolved and helicopter parents were also mentioned as stress factors related to parents and community.

The next part of the first research question dealt with causes of principal stress related to staff (see Table 5).
### Table 5

**Causes of Stress Related to Staff**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Art         | • Teachers who do not show respect to each another  
              • Personality conflicts  
              • Teachers who love kids and love what they do - but do not always love each other |
| Betty       | • Struggles with staff morale because teachers are always dealing with a lack of parental support |
| Chris       | • Staff members who are having difficulty with their job performance, especially those who are unaware of their deficits |
| Donna       | • Figuring out how to communicate new district expectations to the staff without stressing them out and making them feel that one more thing has been added to their plate  
              • Always asking teachers to do more without being able to monetarily give them more in appreciation of their additional time and efforts |
| Ellie       | • Teachers who file grievances against the principal, even when the principal has worked hard to build relationships with them, to listen to their perspectives, and to help them understand the reasons for their expectations |
| Fred        | • Staff members who do not perform their job well – negative attitude, late, unprepared  
              • Teachers who do not seem to like children – why are they in this profession? |
| Gail        | • Always striving to ensure that teachers have the time and resources they need  
              • Looking for ways to take things off teachers’ plates when possible  
              • Efforts to constantly monitor the pulse of the campus as related to how staff are feeling at every point of the year  
              • Teacher job performance  
              • Putting the right combination of teachers together on the right teams for optimal job performance |
| Henry       | • Teachers who are not doing their job well, but who resist efforts to help them improve  
              • Teachers who are doing an amazing job, yet they worry that they are not doing enough |

Teacher job performance constituted one of the two most prevalent responses to the question regarding stress related to staff. Fifty percent of participants identified that dealing with staff members who do not perform their job well causes significant stress, particularly when the struggling staff members are either unaware of their deficits or resist efforts made by the
principal to help them improve. An equivalent percentage of participants also categorized staff morale as an area that increases principal stress. These participants contended that it is a major challenge to maintain healthy levels of teacher morale in the building when they deal with ongoing issues, such as lacking parental support and increasing district demands, without compensation. Additionally, it was noted by Henry that some of the best teachers in the building experience the highest stress levels because they always worry that they could be doing even more to make an even larger impact on their students’ lives.

Also pertaining to principal stress related to staff, both Art and Gail emphasized the importance of creating balanced, cohesive teams so that optimal effectiveness in both professional collaboration and student instruction can be achieved. Gail elaborated on this topic with the following declaration:

You can have a lot of great teachers, but the combination of the people together sometimes isn’t the right combination. It doesn’t matter what a great teacher you are individually if you are not a great team, and you are not going to be nearly as successful as you could be if you are not working together. So sometimes that can be just as difficult as having one employee who isn’t performing.

Along those same lines, Art communicated the following:

I just wish they’d play nice with one another. It tends to be personality conflicts more than situations where someone is doing something heinous or wrong or detrimental to kids. You know, I’ve been blessed to work with a lot of teachers who just love kids and love what they do. But they don’t always love each other as well. They’re great for their kids, but they’re not always good to each other, and that’s stressful.

Table 6 summarizes participants’ perceptions regarding causes of stress related to supervisors and central office administration. Participant responses to this question varied significantly, though they were able to be categorized into four central themes.
Table 6

*Causes of Stress Related to Supervisors and Central Office Administration*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>- Internal pressure to meet one’s personal perceptions of what supervisors expect&lt;br&gt;- Personal desire to show supervisors that he was the right choice for this particular campus principal position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>- Pressure for the campus to meet district expectations with regard to scores on state assessments&lt;br&gt;- Lacking support&lt;br&gt;- Unmet need for additional campus staffing in critical areas (special education, instructional support, etc.)&lt;br&gt;- No provision of requested support and training from district special education personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>- Requirement for campus principals to submit improvement plans and to justify those plans when campus data from a unit assessment does not meet district criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>- Lack of campus autonomy with decisions regarding team teaching and instructional minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>- Feeling the need to defend your competence and professional aptitude when complaint or grievance situations arise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>- Uncertainty about who to call for help if more academic assistance with students is needed in particular areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>- Frequent occasions when the district curriculum department does not have the curriculum and/or resources that teachers need, or when promised materials are not prepared by the time that teachers need them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>- When the district requires campus implementation of new programs that take a lot of time and aren’t impactful to children’s education&lt;br&gt;- Too many managerial responsibilities given to principals that take their focus away from more important things</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, 25% of participants spoke about pressure that was placed on principals by the district regarding campus scores on state assessments (STAAR). Chris reported that he receives performance pressure from central office personnel and explained that his district requires for all principals to submit improvement plans and justification of the reasoning behind these plans when campus data from a district unit assessment did not meet specified criteria. Betty shared that she feels the same pressure for her campus to perform well and meet district expectations,
yet she does not feel that she is supported with the amount of campus staffing that she needs in order to adequately address the needs of her students.

Thus, lacking support comprised the second theme that emerged from participant responses to the question regarding stress related to supervisors and central office administration. Twenty-five percent of participants believed that lacking support from district administration significantly contributes to their stress level. Though Betty maintained that her supervisors provide verbal support and that her relationships with district administration are good, she strongly believed that the verbal support should be translated into physical provision of the resources needed to meet her campus academic needs. She further clarified her perspective in this personal statement:

I feel supported [by district administration]. I know that they genuinely want to help me. I know that they genuinely know where my struggles are, and they know that I am working as hard as I can. They know my staff is working as hard as they can. But I feel like at central office this year that they’ve got a lot of schools that are in my situation, and they are spread thin. From my perspective, they need to get a better plan in place to really dig in and provide more human resources to help us. That’s the bottom line.

Ellie’s feelings regarding the lack of support provided by her district’s administration pertained to complaint and grievance situations, rather than to test scores. When parents or teachers complain to the district regarding something at her campus, she feels the need to justify and defend her stance with district administration. Ellie expressed that it is her desire for her supervisors to trust her abilities and competence.

The third theme regarding stress related to supervisors and central office administration pertained to the issues of organization, communication, and follow-through within the district curriculum department. Twenty-five percent of participants disclosed that these curriculum department issues impact their stress level as an elementary principal, and it is important to
note as well that these participants serve as elementary principals within different school districts. Specifically, Fred revealed that he is frequently uncertain about what to do or who to call if his students continue to struggle in particular academic areas, even with the resources that might have already been provided by the district curriculum department. Gail reported that the curriculum department in her district often does not have the academic resources that her teachers need. She also mentioned that promised curricular materials are frequently not prepared by the time that teachers need to use them.

Lack of solicited input from principals emerged as the final theme regarding stress related to supervisors and central office administration. Twenty-five percent of participants disclosed that their district administration routinely makes major decisions and pushes down new programs and initiatives without seeking input from principals. According to their perspective, principals have the best understanding of what teachers and students need. Therefore, these participants believe that it is not prudent to facilitate decision-making processes that do not include intentional consultation with campus leadership personnel. These principals also felt the overall need for more campus autonomy and less district control. The principals holding this view are not employed in the same school district.

The last question regarding causes of principal stress focused on perceptions related to categories other than the ones specified in the previous questions. The five prior questions have already addressed participants’ perceptions regarding causes of stress related to school type, students, the parent community, staff, and district personnel. Consequently, the purpose of this last, open-ended question was to ascertain if any participants perceived any other causes of principal stress that I had not already identified (see Table 7).
Table 7

*Causes of Stress Related to Other Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Art         | • Balance of time between work and home – being a good principal, as well as a good parent and spouse  
• Difficulty as an introvert to give 100% at school while still having something left for family  
• Challenge of finding time to re-energize so that needed levels can be maintained at both home and school |
| Betty       | • Areas already addressed (students, parents, and teachers) |
| Chris       | • Challenge of keeping all the plates spinning when the principal role encompasses so many moving parts |
| Donna       | • Focus the media and state place on STAAR results  
• Lacking parental understanding of the state assessment system |
| Ellie       | • Balance between meeting student needs and the needs of the staff |
| Fred        | • Feeling pulled in so many directions, making it difficult to spend time in classrooms with students |
| Gail        | • Balance between work and home |
| Henry       | • Limited funds to do what is needed for staff and students  
• Not enough grant opportunities offered by the district  
• Dichotomy between the extremely rich families who live in million-dollar homes and the super poor community who reside in Section 8 housing – difficult to meet these diverse needs |

*Note.* STAAR = State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness.

While participants offered responses that were individually unique, one theme prominently emerged from the interview data. This pronounced line of thought focused on balance. An overwhelming 75% of participants identified that their struggle to achieve balance constituted a significant cause of stress. In listening to the discourse of each participant during the interview, it became discernible that I needed to distinguish between two important types
of balance. Fifty percent of participants spoke about their struggle with the balance of school responsibilities. Chris elaborated on this struggle with these following words:

I’m really learning why the principalship degree used to be called mid-management. Because we have so many people that we have to answer to. We have curriculum directors, we have a special education director, and we have a safety/security department. There are just so many moving parts of the job. So you want to make sure that you keep all the parts moving.

Fred similarly spoke about this struggle, describing the balancing act as “balls being juggled”.

He further stated the following:

I really try to give my teachers a lot of autonomy and trust that they’re going to do what they need to do for their students. And I would say that the majority of them are just right with that. But I think the challenge is the pulls in so many different directions. Okay, this week we have to do contracts. That’s not getting done. I have to put out a phone message. I have to do this and that - and the list goes on and on. But I still need to get in the classrooms. And it sometimes feels like doing the day-to-day, minute-to-minute, little things keeps me from being in the classrooms with the kids, which is where I need to be. I’m not there when I need to be there.

Ellie talked about the stress that occurs from trying so hard to balance her time and efforts between meeting student needs and meeting both the personal and professional needs of her staff members. Additionally, Henry identified that his stress regarding balance comes from his ongoing efforts to meet the diverse needs of his students and families. His campus enrollment includes families who live in million dollar homes, as well as extremely poor families who reside in Section 8 housing.

Conversely, 25% of participants perceived that their stress with regard to balance originates from their struggle to find a balance between their roles at work and home. For instance, Art described his stress as it pertains to balancing home and work responsibilities in the following way:
I have this internal stress between being the best principal I can be, and then being the best husband and father I can be. And the stress of those things, they can be in conflict because both of those require time. I always have that internal struggle of trying to find balance. And then on top of that, I am an introvert. So by the time I’ve given everything I can at school, and I’ve given everything I can with my family, I’m just spent and done and just trying to find some time for me to recoup and reenergize so I can be that best person in both places.

Gail echoed similar thoughts when she described her stress regarding the balance of home and work roles in these following words:

I think that finding balance is hard because our jobs are never done, and you are always on 24 hours a day. Most of the time, after my parents have gotten home and talked to their kids, after dinner the next set of e-mails will come about concerns, questions, or complaints. Also, you walk in the door with one set plan, and your day can totally turn a different direction on account of one behavior or one parent. And there is just so much. You are making decisions constantly. . . . And the decisions are huge because they are affecting children.

Research Question 2

The second research question addressed elementary principals’ perceptions regarding the level of their stress (see Table 8). Two questions comprised this portion of the interview. The first question required participants to rate their stress level in each of the six domains discussed in the first research question. The six domains were as follows: type of school, students, the parent community, staff, district personnel, and causes of stress that did not fit into those five identified categories. Before participants began the rating process, I defined the three stress levels as they pertained to this research study. Those levels were explained to participants as follows:

- Low – insignificant, easily sustainable over an indefinite period of time
- Moderate – significant, though sustainable with effort over an indefinite period of time
• Chronic – very significant, not a level that you desire to sustain or are able to sustain over an indefinite period of time

Once participants had rated their level of stress in all six domains, the second question asked them to rate their overall stress level.

Table 8

**Level of Stress From Identified Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participant</th>
<th>Campus Type</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents and Community</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>District Personnel</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Overall Stress Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Chronic</td>
<td>No response provided</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Chronic</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Chronic</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Chronic</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Chronic</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While participants’ responses to the first research question yielded several patterns and themes, analysis of data from the second research question produced more inconclusive results. Thirty-eight percent of participants rated one domain as chronic; only one participant (Gail) gave the chronic rating in two domains. Intriguingly, Gail has served as an elementary principal for 11 years, which constituted the longest tenure of any participant in this research study. It was also interesting to note that her campus possesses the second lowest percentage
of low SES population (12%) when compared to the campuses of the other participants. Chris, who reported 10 years of elementary principal experience and serves at a campus with a high percentage of low SES families, rated his stress as chronic in one area. Betty and Henry, the other two principals who gave themselves a chronic stress rating in one domain, both work at campuses with high percentages of low SES population (see Table 1). Art and Ellie, the two participants with the least amount of campus leadership experience, did not rate themselves as chronic in any domain. When compared to the other participants, Ellie’s campus maintains the second highest percentage of low SES population. Moreover, all of the principals with more than one year of experience in a Title I campus gave themselves one chronic rating.

The five chronic ratings were given in the domains of staff, district personnel, and other. Gail justified her chronic rating in the staff domain by stating that the spring season brings more stress as one begins to plan for the next year while still needing to focus on successfully completing the current school year. She also shared that the spring season brings an increased number of after-school events, which keeps a principal busier than at other times of the year. Henry disclosed that he rated himself as chronic in the staff domain because of current challenges with a few teachers who are not meeting expectations, and yet are resistant to change.

Betty, the only participant to give a chronic rating in the district personnel category, clarified that she needed a lot more staffing support than she received at her campus this year in order to effectively address the high needs of her challenging student population. Chris, who rated himself as chronic in the domain of other, described how challenging it is to “keep all the parts moving” in a role that has so many different, yet equally important, facets. Gail explained
that her chronic rating in the category of other was due to the fact that she finds it very stressful to balance her roles at work and with her family at home.

Participant response data yielded a similar dispersion of ratings for each of the six domains. Moreover, all six domains contained a mixture of low and moderate ratings. Focusing on participants’ rating of their overall stress level, no one selected the chronic rating. Donna, the only participant to rate her overall stress level as low, is also the participant who works at the campus with the lowest percentage of low SES population at 2%.

To summarize the data analysis for the second research question, results from this question revealed less patterns and themes than did the results from the first question. Participants also shared more data in response to the first open-ended question than they did when simply providing the rating that the second question requested. I also felt that participants seemed hesitant or reluctant to give a chronic self-rating in a domain, as if a chronic rating was somehow equivalent to receiving a bad grade. It proved much easier for them to talk about the causes of their stress than it did for them to actually rate themselves.

Research Question 3

The third research question investigated the extent to which future role expectations (expectancy-value theory) are related to the ongoing stress that elementary principals perceive. This section of the interview consisted of two central questions. The first question asked participants about the impact they feel that current challenges will have if they continue in their current elementary principal role for the next five or ten years. For the second question, responses varied as participants pondered their future career plans based upon current perceptions of stress in the elementary principalship. These two questions regarding the
relationship between future role expectations and stress perceptions were the most difficult for participants to answer.

Table 9 displays participants’ future role expectations based upon their current perceptions of stress. Fifty percent of participants believed that stress in the elementary principal role will increase with time, while 38% postulated that stress in the elementary principalship will decline during the next five to ten years. One participant anticipated that stress in the principalship will remain the same over time. Participants who felt that stress will rise in the coming years shared different reasons for this perspective. Their reasons included the following: expanding workload and demands, rising state testing standards, increase of campus Title I percentage, higher rates of teacher burnout, and shifting demographics.

Conversely, participants who perceived that stress levels will decrease during the next several years gave several reasons for their reasoning. Betty hoped that her investment of time and efforts into building staff capacity and community relationships will improve her campus conditions in the coming years. Elli and Gail both felt that stress in the principalship will lessen as they continue to gain experience in dealing with the role’s challenges.

When I analyzed the principals who believed that stress will decrease and compared their demographic data to those participants who felt that stress will instead increase, I did not find themes or patterns regarding their years of experience, type of school, or low SES campus percentage. Moreover, participants with the highest percentages of low SES population fell into both the increasing stress and decreasing stress categories. Newer principals and more experienced principals also yielded mixed results, as did those participants with lower SES percentages.
Table 9

*Future Role Expectations Based Upon Current Perceptions of Stress*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Future Role Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>• It is a struggle to find balance between work and personal time now. Anticipating that workload and demands will grow over time, it will become increasingly difficult (if not impossible) to manage the additional responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Betty       | • The investment of time and efforts into building staff capacity will help to reduce future stress in the principal role.  
• The current priority of working to build trust and respect between the school and homeowner community will ideally create more balanced campus demographics in future years. A more equitable balance between homeowner families and apartment families will hopefully reduce principalship stress because students will come to school with richer background experiences and less need for academic remediation. As a result, test scores will rise, and teachers will not have to work so hard. |
| Chris       | • If state testing standards continue to rise and the campus Title I percentage continues to increase with the changing neighborhood demographics, the principal role will become more stressful. |
| Donna       | • Continuing to ask teachers to do more, while simultaneously cutting the budget, will result in a higher rate of teacher burnout and increased teacher turn-over. Unrealistically high job expectations for teachers might also cause the number of good, qualified teacher applicants to decline. As a result of these factors, the principal job will become more stressful over time.  
• Replacing teachers on a more frequent basis requires additional time and investment in the training and building of staff capacity. This process becomes more rigorous, and therefore more stressful, when the principal is constantly starting over with new personnel. |
| Ellie       | • As a first-year principal, this year has included a lot of learning and self-reflection. Stress in the principalship should lessen in future years as skills continue to be honed in areas such as delegation, establishment of campus vision, and empowering others. |
| Fred        | • Due to the ever-changing nature of education, stress will always be present in the principalship. Therefore, it is expected that stress levels will remain the same over the next 5-10 years in this role.  
• Significant stressors will continue to include: teacher buy-in with regard to changes and new initiatives, helping teachers to let go of traditional practices that are not proving to be fully effective, or unhappy parents and/or staff.  
• Being proactive (rather than reactive) helps to reduce stress levels over time.  
• The keys are to ensure that hiring is performed well, that teachers are meeting the expectations of their role, and that students are consistently engaged in learning. When these things are all in place, future problems will be minimal. |
| Gail        | • Stress in the principalship will lessen over the coming years as relatively new principals continue to gain experience in dealing with the role’s challenges. |
| Henry       | • Stress related to parents will increase over the next several years due to neighborhood turnover and more homeowners enrolling at the campus.  
• Stress related to campus type will also most increase with time because community demographics are shifting. |
The purpose of the second question regarding future role expectations was to ascertain if participants currently plan to continue serving as an elementary principal until retirement (see Table 10). Based upon their responses, a follow-up question was posed in order to gain an understanding of the reasoning for both affirmative and negative answers. If participants answered that they do plan to continue in the elementary principalship until retirement, then I asked for them to explain the reason for their decision. On the other hand, when participants responded that they do not plan to serve as an elementary principal until retirement, I asked for the reasons why they desire to leave the principalship and inquired about the type of position they will seek instead.

Sixty-three percent of participants shared that they do not plan to remain an elementary elementary principal until retirement, and 38% disclosed that they do want to stay in their current role until they retire. All of the participants who do not plan to stay in the principalship did state that they desire to stay in education. Betty shared her thoughts about the future of her career as follows:

So many days, even on hard days, I can’t see myself anywhere else or doing anything else because I really do love my school, I love the kids that I serve, and I love my teachers - even on the hardest of days. But I will tell you, when you think about not just stress level but also work level, it’s exhausting. I don’t know if I can do it for 10 or 15 more years. I just don’t know if you can go at break-neck speed for so long in a Title 1 school with so many needs.

Despite the exhaustion she is feeling in her current role, Betty made it very clear that she does not want to leave the field of education. Instead, she talked about options such as seeking a principalship in an elementary school with different demographics than where she currently serves. She also expressed a desire to explore the possibility of returning to a district curriculum role with an emphasis on language arts.
Table 10

*Future Career Plan Based Upon Current Perceptions of Stress*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Future Career Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Art**     | • Plans to continue serving as an elementary school principal until retirement  
• Enjoys working with children, so leaving a campus position for a central office job would not be appealing  
• Would consider moving back down to the classroom if a career change is ever needed |
| **Betty**   | • Loves the students, teachers, and school (even on the hardest of hard days)  
• Doubts the ability to sustain this work and stress level for 10-15 more years because it is exhausting in this particular Title I school with so many significant needs  
• Might seek a principalship at an elementary school with different demographics from the current campus  
• Might return to a district curriculum role with an emphasis on language arts  
• Would return to teaching in a heartbeat if current salary was able to be maintained because teaching reading is the all-time favorite thing to do  
• Would love a job that combines the district curriculum role with opportunities to still work with students |
| **Chris**   | • Plans to continue serving as an elementary principal until retirement, even though the campus is very challenging  
• Feels that students and families appreciate the efforts of teachers/administrators  
• Loves to see the success that results from hard work |
| **Donna**   | • Does not plan to continue serving as an elementary principal until retirement  
• Feels that too many years remain until retirement to stay a principal  
• Would like to pursue educational consulting (talking to principals about their mission and vision)  
• Might consider serving as an Assistant Superintendent (overseeing district curriculum and instruction) |
| **Ellie**   | • Desires to stay in the principal role until vision and goals with regard to student performance at this campus have been accomplished  
• Ultimately desires to move into a district human resources position |
| **Fred**    | • Plans to continue serving as an elementary principal until retirement  
• Feels content in current campus assignment and expressed that retirement is too close for pursuit of a promotion |
| **Gail**    | • Enjoys current principalship, but is ready to do something different  
• Might be interested in opening another new school or trying a different school environment  
• Would enjoy a role that focuses on new principal mentoring principals or the provision of assistance to struggling principals |
| **Henry**   | • Does not plan to continue serving as an elementary principal until retirement  
• Predicts eventual complacency in the principal role and would therefore experience career stagnation  
• Would be interested in moving to a different type of campus with challenges that vary from the current campus placement  
• Enjoys curriculum and research, but would miss the students in a district-based role |
Furthermore, Betty stated that her greatest passion is teaching reading. If she could teach reading to elementary students and maintain her current salary, she emphasized that she would return to the classroom in a heartbeat.

The others who expressed a desire to leave their current principalship explained that they need a change now or anticipate that they will need a change prior to retirement. Donna, Ellie, Gail, and Henry all talked about wanting to explore other options within education. Their career interests for the future included educational consulting, assistant superintendent overseeing curriculum, human resources, principal mentor, or a principalship at a different type of campus from where they currently serve. Two of the principals who wanted a change are in the process of earning their doctoral degree in the area of education administration for the purpose of preparing themselves for a future district leadership role.

In contrast, Chris declared that he does want to continue serving as an elementary principal until retirement, even though his campus is very challenging and possesses a high population of low SES students. He expressed his career desires with the following statement:

> Although my community and my school can be challenging, I love it when we reach that bar. There is no other feeling like it. I think about the underdog, especially in the area where we are. A lot of the diversity at the high school comes from my campus. So, although it is challenging and we have to work really hard, the kids are so appreciative. The families are also appreciative and respectful of what we do. So that’s why I will keep doing it.

Fred, who also desires to stay in his current principalship until retirement, expressed his sentiments in these following words:

> There’s always change, there are always new expectations, and there are always parents who are going to be happy or unhappy. There will always be students who are happy or unhappy, and teachers are the same way. So the key is to make sure that you know if your teachers are doing what they’re supposed to be doing, which I feel that they are right now. If I do a good job of hiring and my students are engaged in learning, then
parents are also happy. These practices keep the things that could be upsetting to a minimum.

Thus, a pattern emerged regarding future career plans that merits further explanation. This theme was able to be discerned when comparing the current age of principals, as well as their age at the time they received their first principalship, to their response regarding whether or not they desire to remain in the principalship until retirement. All three of the participants who received their first principalship while in their thirties and who are still in their thirties now expressed a desire to move into another type of educational role prior to retirement. These three principals possessed one to four years of elementary principal experience. Furthermore, four of the five participants who became principals while in their thirties, two of whom are now in their forties, do not want to remain in their current role until retirement. These five principals have one to eleven years of elementary principalship experience.

Lastly, three of the four principals who served at Title I campuses desired a job change prior to retirement. All four principals had served as an elementary principal for four years or less. However, their reasons for wanting a change differed. While Betty doubted her ability to sustain the level of stress that her current position yields, Donna and Ellie would like to pursue an eventual promotion to a district supervisory role. Henry, on the other hand, feared that he would eventually become complacent in his current position and did not feel that it would continue to fulfill and challenge him. For that reason, he predicted that he would need a change at some point to a different type of campus.

Research Question 4

The final research question examined ways in which stress and its causes could be addressed. I asked participants about stress management in three specific areas: personal
strategies, campus-specific strategies, and district-implemented strategies. For each of those three areas, I also asked participants to identify strategies that they would like to try or see implemented in the future for the alleviation of stress.

Table 11 displays the personal strategies that participants reported they have put into place in order to manage their job-related stress.

Table 11

Ways to Address Stress: Current Personal Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions Regarding Current Personal Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>• Refrains from checking school email on the weekends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Betty       | • Does not feel that personal strategies are in place  
              • Does not exercise anymore due to consistent long hours at work |
| Chris       | • Relies on faith  
              • Keeps a balance among God, family, and job |
| Donna       | • Meets consistently with a group of principals in the district who have also become personal friends |
| Ellie       | • Increases sleep time  
              • Uses food to deal with stress (over-eating) |
| Fred        | • Over-eats  
              • Avoids task-oriented activities and scheduling appointments on weeknights  
              • Tries to relax on weeknights (reading, cooking, talking to mom on phone)  
              • Brings work home when the amount has become overwhelming |
| Gail        | • Exercises regularly (three times per week)  
              • Shuts down and rejuvenates over breaks |
| Henry       | • Maintains a balance between work and home; leaves work at work |

A few significant themes emerged from participants’ responses regarding current personal strategies. First, all but one participant reported that they have implemented some type of personal strategy in order to manage their job-related stress. Betty, the one participant who
disclosed that she does not have any personal strategies in place that help to alleviate her stress, shared the following reasons for her struggle:

In order to get to that workout that I love, I have to leave my campus by 5:15 on three days per week. I can’t do it. There is too much work to do at night. My days are in the building, and my nights are spent doing all the work that I didn’t get done during the day. I think finding balance is incredibly hard for me. Sadly, I am so thankful that I don’t have a family at home right now, so that I can let my job consume me and so that I can try to right this ship that I have been given. But I know that I lead an extremely unhealthy life. I know this is something that I need to work on.

Interestingly, Betty’s campus has the highest percentage of low SES population (95%) when compared to the campuses of the other research participants.

With the exception of Betty, all of the other participants were able to identify specific personal strategies that they have already implemented in order to alleviate stress. Seventy-five percent of participants talked about the importance of finding a balance between work and home. For some participants, this balance included the prioritization of time for God and supportive individuals such as family and friends. Table 11 shows several of these balancing strategies, which include the following:

- Leave work at work
- Allow time for God and family
- Spend time with personal friends
- Relax on week nights

Additionally, 25% of participants reported that good physical habits, such as getting sufficient sleep each night and a consistent exercise regimen, have helped them with stress management.
Unfortunately, 38% of participants revealed that their personal stress-reducing strategies are not healthy. Besides Betty, who stated that she does not have any good personal strategies in place, Ellie and Fred admitted that they frequently use food to cope with stress. Therefore, over-eating and excessive body weight both constitute struggles for these two individuals, among other related health concerns.

Regarding personal strategies for future implementation, all participants mentioned either balance or health, and one participant talked about both of these topics (see Table 12).

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions Regarding Personal Strategies for Future Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Art         | • Schedule all PTA night functions on Wednesdays only (except for major events like Fall Carnival that occur on Friday evenings)  
• Go home at a reasonable hour on all other school nights except Wednesdays to have time with personal children and attend their activities  
• Talk to PTA President about moving Board meetings from evenings to day time – if meetings are not moved, then attend only the day time ones |
| Betty       | • Re-establish a consistent exercise routine  
• Commit to leaving school at 5:30 on two days per week in order to do something enjoyable |
| Chris       | • Try to leave school by 4:30 on one day each week |
| Donna       | • Engage in physical exercise on a more frequent basis – motivation is difficult because work is exhausting |
| Ellie       | • Exercise more regularly – it is hard to give permission to self for this time |
| Fred        | • Make effort to have healthier eating habits |
| Gail        | • Stop allowing school concerns to consume thoughts, even when at home with family |
| Henry       | • Continue to work at achieving the appropriate balance between parent and spouse roles at home and being a school administrator |
Sixty-three percent of participants discussed the importance of establishing a better balance between work and home life. Strategies for future implementation included the following:

- Limit evening school functions to certain days of the week.
- Go home at a reasonable time on specific days in order to allow time for family, friends, and/or exercise.
- Compartmentalize job-related thoughts and focus on family when at home.

Furthermore, 50% of participants wanted to form healthier habits. These habits included healthier eating and exercising regularly.

The second portion of Research Question 4 investigated perceptions regarding current campus-specific strategies that help to manage stress related to the principalship and future campus strategies that participants would like to implement for the alleviation of stress. Table 13 lists the current campus strategies reported by participants. It is intriguing to note that 63% of participants mentioned a strategy in their response that had been implemented for the purpose of teacher stress reduction and not for the alleviation of the principal’s stress. These teacher strategies primarily included various morale-building activities such as fun events, recognition, and fitness activities. One principal readily admitted that he currently feels over-extended and is still in the process of determining what campus-based strategies are needed for management of administrator stress.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions Regarding Current Campus Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>• Is still trying to determine some campus strategies; currently feels over-extended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Betty       | • Builds in a lot of positive elements to re-energize the staff  
              • Tries to recognize staff members for their hard work  
              • Uses the Sunshine Committee to plan fun events during the year (ex: Happy Hour once per month)  
              • Offers running/walking club on Tuesdays for staff and students |
| Chris       | • Implements morale-building activities throughout the year for staff (ex: Instructional Leadership Team went around the school, serving pie on a cart)  
              • Builds in a 10-15 minute workout led by P.E. teacher before a meeting |
| Donna       | • Utilizes campus funds to continue the district-initiated leadership coaching opportunity after the district-paid sessions concluded  
              • Initiates a staff fitness challenge during the month of February each year (teambuilding)  
              • Walks three laps around the campus perimeter with the secretary during each school day |
| Ellie       | • Meets weekly with leadership team  
              • Keeps an ongoing task list and delegates to others on the leadership team (Assistant Principal, Media Resource Specialist, Librarian, and Counselor) |
| Fred        | • Makes a conscious effort to leave the office and spend time in classrooms with students when feeling stressed  
              • Delegates to Assistant Principal and Office Manager  
              • Greets students during arrival and dismissal times each day  
              • Incorporates fun activities for staff, such as Super Bowl Game |
| Gail        | • Schedules morale boosters for the staff (ex: chili cook-off, dress-up days) |
| Henry       | • Creates close friendships with Instructional Leadership Team (campus does not have an Assistant Principal, so this team is responsible for a lot)  
              • Fosters a family atmosphere |

When asked about campus-specific strategies for future implementation (see Table 14), participants provided a variety of responses that did not fall into particular categories or themes.
Table 14

Ways to Address Stress: Campus Strategies for Future Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions Regarding Campus Strategies for Future Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>• Block off time in the daily schedule for specific important activities such as classrooms visits, team planning, pre-conferences for T-TESS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Betty       | • Filter the district demands to protect teachers from unnecessary stress  
              • Compartmentalize information for the staff in order to prevent overload  
              • Let the district know when it will be necessary to adjust a task or deadline based upon the needs of teachers |
| Chris       | • Give teachers an opportunity to relax and be creative, such as Day of Clay with the art teacher |
| Donna       | • No future campus strategies provided |
| Ellie       | • Focus on health and wellness as a stress-relieving strategy for all of the campus staff; as a Healthy Zone school, this step is logical (it will also help in holding the principal more accountable for personal health, too) |
| Fred        | • May implement Restorative Discipline next year in order to help with developing the whole child as opposed to just the academic portion  
              • Focus on fostering relationships between teachers and students/parents in order to further decrease office referrals  
              • Continue to emphasize project-based learning and Genius Hour as ways to increase student engagement and excitement about learning  
              • Continue to ensure that teachers feel supported |
| Gail        | • Learn to be content with where the campus is, instead of constantly striving to make things bigger and/or better |
| Henry       | • Continue to get to know staff personally without crossing the line  
              • Continue cultivating a family atmosphere that helps teachers deal with stress when it comes |

Fifty percent of participants again focused the majority of their response on strategies for the purpose of relieving teacher stress. Their responses included the following strategies:

- Filter district demands to protect teachers from unnecessary stress.
- Provide additional morale-building activities.
- Continue the cultivation of a family atmosphere.
Fifty percent of participants, however, provided relevant campus-specific strategies that they would like to implement for the alleviation of principal stress. Responses did not fit into defined categories. For instance, Art shared that he would like to be more disciplined about blocking off time in his schedule for campus responsibilities that are easy to neglect, such as classroom visits and team planning. Fred talked about Restorative Discipline and felt that a focus on that program would reduce his stress, as well as the stress of his teachers. Gail, on the other hand, felt that she needs to find a balance between striving to make things better and learning to be content.

Finally, the third part of Research Question 4 analyzed perceptions regarding current district-implemented strategies that help with the alleviation of stress related to the principalship and future strategies that participants would like to see their district espouse for the purpose of stress management. Table 15 displays participant responses as they pertained to current district strategies. It is interesting to observe that 38% of participants did not provide any district-implemented strategies or initiatives. When asked about their lack of response, they replied that they did not feel that the district was currently providing any strategies that assist in the reduction of principal stress. Positively, however, 63% of participants provided diverse strategies that have already been implemented in their current district. These strategies or practices included the following:

- Support from district curriculum department
- Provision of principal coach
- Creation of principal leadership teams
- Timely communication from district regarding professional development, deadlines, and vision
- Trust in campus personnel

Table 15

*Ways to Address Stress: Current District Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions Regarding Current District Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>• No strategies provided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Betty       | • No district strategies implemented to reduce stress  
              • Improvement needed in this area            |
| Chris       | • Support from district curriculum specialists to help with reading/science groups and planning  
              • Intentional alignment of professional development with what is being taught at that time |
| Donna       | • Provision of a principal coach – six sessions during school year  
              • Facilitation of professional relationships among principals by creating principal leadership teams that are required to periodically meet together |
| Ellie       | • Monthly newsletter from Assistant Superintendent with a running list of things for consideration, such as professional development opportunities  
              • Timely communication from the district regarding tasks and deadlines  
              • Unity with regard to district vision – District personnel have worked with schools this year to connect and align their plans with district goals. |
| Fred        | • Availability of district personnel when help is needed |
| Gail        | • Trust in campus personnel to manage their schools well  
              • No micromanagement of campuses with a myriad of requirements and reports |
| Henry       | • No district programs or initiatives in place to help with stress  
              • Supportive and personable Executive Director - principals not made to feel guilty for staying home with a sick child |

Regarding district strategies for future implementation, participants provided thoughts that varied immensely and could not be placed into only a few categories (see Table 16).
### Table 16

**Ways to Address Stress: District Strategies for Future Implementation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perceptions Regarding District Strategies for Future Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>• Continue to consistently communicate with principals regarding pertinent information – much recent change in central office, feelings of uncertainty until future expectations are understood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>• No specific district strategies given, though it was emphasized that help from the district is needed during this challenging time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>• Create a master calendar for all district departmental meetings in order to improve communication and organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Donna       | • Allow principals to go out to lunch after district meetings with principals of their choice, rather than provision of lunch at the meetings with assigned seating  
• Plan more frequent Happy Hour events for elementary principals throughout the school year |
| Ellie       | • Keep district personnel in the same roles with fewer transitions for a period of time in order to build consistency of rapport with principals |
| Fred        | • Continue to support principals when parents call with campus complaints |
| Gail        | • Create uniform procedures, policies and protocols for needed issues in order to promote consistency among all the campuses in the district |
| Henry       | • Seek principal input when determining new initiatives and programs for campus implementation |

Betty constituted the only participant who emphasized how much she needs more district support. She expressed her candid thoughts in this following statement:

> As far as what the district can do, I don’t really know. I am going to be honest, I don’t know what they can do, but I think they need to do something. But I don’t know what that would be. I don’t have any suggestions for them, but I do think they need to do something. It’s tough right now.

As Table 16 portrays, the other seven research participants shared differing perceptions of what their district should implement in order to assist with the alleviation of principal stress. Those perceptions can be summarized as follows:
• Improve communication and organization.

• Provide more social opportunities for principals that help to build strong professional relationships.

• Build consistency of rapport with principals by minimizing the changes among district personnel roles.

• Continue to support and trust principals.

• Create uniform policies and procedures where needed for consistency among campuses.

• Seek principal input before making major decisions that impact campuses.

In closing, while perceptions varied greatly among participants, as demonstrated by the responses to the questions that pertained to district-implemented strategies, it is clear from the data that all participants believe that changes are needed, and they desire for their perspective to be valued.

Summary

This chapter reported the findings of this qualitative research study. It included a description of the participants and analysis of the data collected. Results were presented as they specifically related to the four research questions that undergirded this study. The final chapter summarizes the research study, discusses findings as related to literature and theory, explains implications, and provides recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of this research study and significant conclusions based upon the data reported in Chapter 4. It also includes a description of the implications for action and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

With additional information regarding elementary principal burnout, it may be possible to identify problems and address related retention issues. Moreover, a deeper understanding of the factors that most significantly contribute to the chronic stress and burnout of elementary principals in north Texas may assist both district supervisors and campus administrators as they seek to alleviate stress and prevent burnout. Therefore, this qualitative research study sought to investigate the perspectives of elementary principals in the north Texas region, regarding potential issues related to stress and burnout.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

This qualitative study was designed to examine the current status of elementary principals’ perceptions regarding their level of stress and burnout, identify causes for the stress, and investigate principals’ suggestions by which stress might be alleviated. The study also analyzed the extent to which future role expectations are related to the chronic stress and feelings of burnout that elementary principals perceive. Knowledge related to causes and possible solutions for elementary principal stress that results in burnout is needed in order to
keep quality school leaders who stay in the profession longer than a few years. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. What are elementary principals’ perceptions about the causes of their stress?
2. What are elementary principals’ perceptions about their level of stress?
3. To what extent are future role expectations (expectancy-value theory) related to the ongoing stress that elementary principals perceive?
4. What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding ways to address their stress and its causes?

Review of the Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research design to analyze eight elementary principals in large, suburban school districts within north Texas who experienced similar professional preparation prior to receiving their first principalship. These eight principals were identified through the qualitative process of criterion sampling. All eight participants first completed a survey that primarily focused on demographic and background information. Then, I conducted an in-depth interview with each of the eight participants. The interview protocol (Appendix B) utilized open-ended questioning strategies that allowed each participant to speak freely about the factors that most significantly contribute to feelings of stress and burnout.

Once data had been collected, all of the interviews were transcribed in their entirety from the audio recording into an electronic Microsoft Word document. I carefully reviewed all of the transcribed data and utilized a coding process for detailed analysis. During analysis, I was able to determine categories and themes from the data, as discussed in Chapter 4. Findings were validated through my use of a second reader. This second reader reviewed every
transcript and piece of analysis in order to verify and validate the credibility of this research study.

Major Findings

Major findings are discussed and summarized as they pertain to each of the four research questions. Regarding the first research question that examined elementary principals’ perceptions about the causes of their stress, data clearly revealed that participants struggle with significant stress in each of the five specified cause domains. The causes of their stress were able to be categorized into themes for each domain, as displayed in Table 17.

Table 17

*Causes of Stress: Summary of Perceptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Type</strong></td>
<td>• High percentage of low SES population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• High percentage of high SES population – helicopter parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td>• Factors outside of school’s control, such as home struggles, emotional needs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CPS concerns, and poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Academic needs and learning gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents and Community</strong></td>
<td>• Contentious relationships between parents and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Effective communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
<td>• Staff job performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Personnel</strong></td>
<td>• Pressure from district regarding campus scores on state assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lacking campus support from district personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Issues of organization, communication, and follow-through in curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of principal input in district decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>• Balance of school responsibilities when feeling pulled in so many directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Balance between roles at work and home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, participants identified that they struggle with balancing their workload, as shown in the sixth, open-ended domain.

For the second research question that investigated elementary principals’ perceptions about their level of stress, major findings are summarized in Table 18.

Table 18

Levels of Stress: Summary of Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress Categories</th>
<th>Number of Participants Who Perceived Each Level of Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Type</td>
<td>Low – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate - 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Low – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate - 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and Community</td>
<td>Low – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate - 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Low – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chronic - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Personnel</td>
<td>Low – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chronic - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Low – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chronic – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Response - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Low - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate - 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While two to four participants identified their stress level as low for an individual stress category, only one participant selected the low rating for the overall stress level category. As Chapter 4 explained, the low SES population at that participant’s current campus stands at only two percent. That small percentage constituted the least amount of low SES population when compared to the campus assignments of all other participants. The fact that seven participants
identified their overall stress level as moderate does represent a major finding of this study, especially when considering that the range of principalship experience among participants is only one to eleven years. Three participants are still in their thirties with many years remaining in their career, and only one participant is within a few years of retirement. This finding suggests that if strategies for stress alleviation are not put into place, these principals would likely reach the chronic level well before the conclusion of their career.

Next, Table 19 summarizes the major findings pertaining to Research Question 3. The third research question focused on the extent to which future role expectations are related to the ongoing stress that principals perceive.

Table 19

Summary of Future Role Expectations as Related to Perceptions of Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future Impact of Current Challenges</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future Impact of Current Challenges</td>
<td>50% Felt Stress Will Increase</td>
<td>• Expanding workload and demands, rising state testing standards, increase of campus Title I percentage, higher rates of teacher burnout, and/or shifting demographics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Impact of Current Challenges</td>
<td>38% Felt Stress Will Decrease</td>
<td>• Current time investments will reap future benefits, and principals will feel less stress as they gain more years of experience in dealing with the role’s challenges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Future Career Plans | 63% | • Will not remain in principalship until retirement, but will stay in education field • Roles include: district curriculum, educational consulting, assistant superintendent, human resources, principal mentor, or different type of principalship from their current campus. |
| Future Career Plans | 38% | • Will not stay in current principalship role until retirement |

As shown in Table 19, participant data were able to be categorized into two specific themes for each of the portions of the question. Regarding the future impact of current challenges, 50% of
participants shared their reasoning for why they believe that principal stress will increase during the next five to ten years. Though the reasons were not the same among participants for why elementary principalship stress will rise, the fact that half of participants shared a common outlook for the future definitely qualifies as a major finding.

It is also important to note that the 38% of participants who optimistically predicted that principalship stress will decline in the coming years did not believe that the stress factors as identified in Research Question 1 will actually decrease. Instead, their provided reasoning pertained to hope. Those participants hope that their hard work and immense dedication to their role in the present will pay off in the future. According to their interview responses, these participants also hope that more experience in dealing with the role’s challenges will cause those challenges to become less significant in time, even if the intensity of the challenges does not change.

Analysis of participant data pertaining to future career plans yielded the major finding that 63% of participants do not plan to remain in their current principalship until retirement. This significant percentage reveals that the majority of participants are not content or satisfied in their current position. As discussed in Chapter 4, a theme emerged regarding the relationship between the age at when a participant first received a principalship and the desire to leave the principal role prior to retirement. Based upon the data reported in Chapter 4, individuals who become principals in their thirties are not likely to remain in the principalship for the duration of their career.

This finding is important because districts need to realize that the selection of young principals will likely result in a higher rate of principal turnover than would be the case if
districts hired principals who are further into their career at the time of their first principalship. Importantly, this study simply reports this finding regarding age of principals and their likelihood to remain in their current principalship until retirement. It was not the purpose or intent of this study to investigate the factors, positive or negative, related to principal effectiveness at various ages or stages of career.

Lastly, major findings related to elementary principals’ perceptions of ways to address their stress are provided in Table 20. Strategies are categorized into those that are personally maintained, those that are campus-based, and those that are instituted by the school district. Major findings related to personal strategies include the fact that all participants reported current personal strategies that fall into the categories of either work-home balance or healthy habits. Another major finding is the concerning statistic that 38% of participants disclosed that their personal strategies are unhealthy. Personal goals for the future included these same themes of balance and health as reported by all participants.

In the category of campus-specific strategies for stress management, 63% of participants focused on the provision of staff morale-building opportunities. This major finding indicates that principals themselves feel less stress when staff morale is high. It also suggests that principals consider the needs of others before their own needs. This finding supports the earlier discussion regarding the 38% of participants who currently have unhealthy personal strategies in place because they are not prioritizing time for the meeting of their own personal needs. The other current campus-specific strategies that participants provided did not fit into themes or categories.
Table 20

Ways to Address Stress: Summary of Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Personal Strategies</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
<th>Future Personal Strategies</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Maintain balance between work and home</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>• Improve balance between work and home</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritize healthy habits such as sufficient sleep and regular exercise</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>• Eat healthier and exercise more consistently</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engage in unhealthy habits to deal with stress such as overeating</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Campus Strategies</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
<th>Future Campus Strategies</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Implement morale-building activities for staff</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>• Reduce staff stress by filtering district demands, providing</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>additional morale-building activities, and/or cultivating of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a family atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participate in leadership coaching, delegate responsibilities to other leadership team</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>• Block off time in schedule for important things, implement</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Restorative Discipline, and/or find balance between striving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to be better and being content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current District Strategies</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
<th>Future District Strategies</th>
<th>Diverse responses included:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Do not feel that district provides strategies that assist in the management of principal stress</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>• Improve communication and organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give support, provide principal coach, create principal leadership teams, communicate effectively, and/or trust principals</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>• Provide more social opportunities for principals to help principals in building strong professional relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Minimize changes among district personnel role in order to build consistency of rapport with principals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Support and trust principals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Create uniform policies and procedures where needed for consistency among campuses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Seek principal input before making major decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants’ responses in the category of future campus-based strategies yielded similar trends as are visible in the domain of current campus strategies. Fifty-percent of participants focused on morale-building of staff, and the rest of the responses varied among participants.

Regarding district-implemented strategies, 38% of participants do not feel that their district provides strategies that assist in the management of principal stress. Moreover, these participants are not all from the same north Texas district. Thus, this major finding suggests that more time needs to be invested by district personnel in the determination of what additional strategies can be implemented in order to alleviate some of the stress that elementary principals perceive. The rest of the district-implemented strategies shared by participants, both current and future, were unique and did not contribute to a particular theme or category.

Findings Related to Literature and Theory

Numerous prior research studies have already established that burnout and chronic stress impact countless principals at various institutional levels, from those who lead in elementary schools to those who serve as the administrators of middle and high school campuses (Adams, 1999; Allison, 1997; Andreyko, 2010; Boyland, 2011; Combs et al., 2009; Doud & Keller, 1998; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). A wealth of medical research shows a distinct correlation between unaddressed chronic stress and exhaustion, burnout and serious physical or mental illnesses (Boyland, 2011; Clarke, 1985; Colbert, 2008; Wheeler, 2007). Moreover, many researchers have investigated principal burnout symptoms and causes, though the vast majority of those studies did not specifically focus on principals of elementary campuses. Instead, some studies analyzed the subject of principal burnout with a broader lens, analyzing
its impact on a spectrum of professions, while other studies closely examined burnout as it related to administrators in other specific regions of the United States and world. For these reasons, a great deal of ambiguity exists regarding the specific primary causes of burnout for elementary principals. Additionally, the body of research on principal stress does not provide relevant current information pertaining to the stress of elementary principals in large, suburban districts within the north Texas region.

This qualitative study was designed to fill that void by examining the current status of elementary principals’ perceptions regarding their level of stress and burnout, identifying causes for the stress, and investigating principals’ suggestions by which stress might be alleviated. Furthermore, this study also analyzed the extent to which future role expectations are related to the chronic stress and feelings of burnout that elementary principals perceive. The relevant findings reported in this study, along with the work of those who conduct future related research (see Recommendations for Further Research), will definitely contribute to the body of literature regarding elementary principal burnout. Additionally, the findings of this study will deepen readers’ understanding of the stress that elementary principals perceive.

It is also important to include a discussion in this section regarding the relationship of this research study to the two-part conceptual framework that served to theoretically ground this study (see Figure 1 in Chapter 1). The Yerkes-Dodson law (Endler, Rey, & Butz, 2012; Keller, 2007; “What Is the Yerkes-Dodson law?,” n.d.) and Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) comprised the first part of the conceptual framework for this qualitative study. Both of these theories seek to explain how people are impacted by chronic stress with regard to current role demands.
The Yerkes-Dodson law suggests an inverted-U relationship between pressure and performance (see Figure 2 in Chapter 1), proposing that elevated stress within reasonable bounds can boost performance and that extreme stress can result in decreased performance. The findings of this study do align with the premise of the Yerkes-Dodson law. The data, as reported in Chapter 4, provide support for the assertion that ongoing stress experienced by elementary principals can lead to burnout, unhealthy coping strategies, or desire to leave the principalship if intervention does not occur.

Similarly, Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) transactional model of stress and coping (see Figure 3 in Chapter 1) contributes to the first part of this study’s conceptual framework because this theory explains the root causes of chronic stress. According to Lazarus and Folkman, stress results from a disproportionate relationship between expectations and possession of the appropriate abilities and resources to meet the specified expectation. In other words, stress occurs when a person believes that he or she is not able to deal with the present level of anxiety or pressure. The findings from this study’s Research Question 1 that focused on elementary principals’ perceptions regarding the causes of their stress give credence to the philosophy espoused by Lazarus and Folkman. According to the findings from the first research question, participants struggle with significant stress in all six domains. Additionally, the fact that seven of the eight participants rated their stress level in the principalship as moderate, even in this early to middle state of their career, also supports the definition of stress that Lazarus and Folkman’s theory upholds.

While the first part of this study’s conceptual framework was derived from both Yerkes-Dodson law (“What Is the Yerkes-Dodson law?” n.d.) and Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional
model of stress and coping (1984), the second part of this study’s framework was based upon expectancy-value theory (see Figure 4 in Chapter 1). The third research question of this study investigated the extent to which future role expectations (expectancy-value theory) are related to the ongoing stress and burnout perceived by elementary principals. According to Schunk (2008), expectancy-value theory is based upon the premise that “behavior depends on how much individuals value a particular outcome (goal, reinforcer) and their expectancy of attaining that outcome as a result of performing given behaviors” (p. 466). Consequently, this study sought to analyze the extent to which principals value their perceived outcome/goal and the extent to which they expect they will achieve that perceived outcome as a result of their chosen behavior and efforts. The results reported in Chapter 4 for Research Question 3 support the premise of expectancy-value theory. Fifty percent of participants shared their belief that principal stress will increase in the future, and resultantly, the majority of participants also reported that they do not plan to remain in an elementary principalship until retirement. Therefore, in alignment with expectancy-value theory, participants in this study who do not expect to attain their perceived outcome/goal as a result of their efforts reported that they will find a new type of educational position, besides the elementary principalship, prior to retirement.

**Surprises**

One unexpected outcome resulted from my study, and it deserves further discussion in this section. This surprise pertained to the second research question that investigated elementary principals’ perceptions regarding their level of stress. As reported in Chapter 4, only three participants gave themselves a chronic rating for any stress category, and none of
the participants gave an overall chronic rating. The reason this data surprised me is because participants openly discussed their stresses and challenges as part of the open-ended first question regarding causes of principal stress. In fact, every single participant identified stressful factors in all five of the specified domains. Additionally, when asked about any other sources of principal stress that did not fall into the pre-determined categories, all participants immediately named other causes of stress that they also wanted to include.

It was my perception that participants seemed hesitant or reluctant to give themselves a chronic rating in a domain, as if a chronic rating was somehow equivalent to receiving a bad grade. Though participants were willing to talk freely about their stresses and demonstrated that they trusted me, they did not want to place a chronic label on their stress. Thus, it proved much easier for them to talk about the causes of their stress than it was for them to actually rate themselves. For this reason, the data gained from Research Question 1 proved more valuable in drawing conclusions than did the data that resulted from Research Question 2.

Conclusions

Implications for Action

Several implications for action are critical, based upon the findings of this study. First, district personnel need to invest time and efforts in the development of a plan to support those principals who are struggling with significant stress. Thirty-eight percent of participants in this study disclosed that they rely on unhealthy personal strategies to deal with job-related stress. Other participants also talked about the challenge of finding time for their personal needs, such as healthy eating, sufficient sleep, and regular exercise. Furthermore, all participants discussed their personal goal to find an appropriate balance between their work and home roles. If all
participants are struggling in these areas, it seems that the district should play an important role in helping to alleviate this stress and in creating a plan that helps principals to manage their stress.

Secondly, according to the data collected in this study, the majority of participants do not desire to remain in their current principalship until retirement. Though all participants desired to remain within the field of education, several talked about needing a change at some point from their current assignment. According to the explanations offered by participants, the same set of stressful factors can cause burnout over an extended period of time. Moreover, these participants were amenable to changing campuses so that they would have the opportunity to serve in a school with different demographics from their current campus. This data suggest that districts should give consideration to a plan in which principals are able to provide input regarding their need for a change. In this way, great leaders do not leave the principalship for other types of roles, simply because they were burned out with one type of campus challenge.

Lastly, as a part of Research Question 4, participants candidly shared the district-implemented strategies that they feel are helpful in the alleviation of principal stress. Sadly, 38% of participants could not identify any district-initiated strategies that have proven to be beneficial. Instead, participants articulated that district personnel and central office practices frequently constitute a source of stress for elementary principals.

In light of this information, it seems that district personnel would benefit immensely from feedback provided by campus principals as part of an ongoing assessment regarding district procedures and protocols. Participants frequently mentioned that district personnel
monitor their test scores and campus practices, so it seems only logical that input should be valued in both directions. An anonymous survey instrument could be implemented as the vehicle for provision of this principal feedback. Additionally, principal perceptions could be gained during one-on-one feedback meetings between principals and their supervisors.

In closing, it is important to also note that several participants spoke positively about district personnel, as evidenced by the data reported for Research Question 4. It is the intent of these implications to provide helpful feedback that continues to improve the relationships between district personnel and campus principals.

Recommendations for Further Research

Reflection upon the findings and limitations of this study enabled me to provide the following recommendations for further research:

1. All participants in this study ranged in principalship experience from one to eleven years. What causes and levels of stress would more seasoned principals report?
2. This study did not address gender. Do perceptions regarding stress differ between males and females, assuming that all other variables are controlled?
3. This qualitative research study sought to deeply analyze the perceptions of eight elementary principals across four large suburban school districts in the north Texas area. Would a study that includes elementary principals in other large suburban school districts in north Texas report similar findings?
4. This study focused on participants in suburban districts because the challenges in urban districts typically differ. How would urban elementary school principals respond to
these same four research questions regarding stress in the elementary principal position?

5. All participants in this study received similar professional preparation through an accredited, university-based approach. How would alternatively certified elementary principals respond to the four research questions in this study?

Concluding Remarks

It was the goal of this qualitative research study to examine the current status of elementary principals’ perceptions regarding their level of stress and burnout, identify causes for the stress, and investigate principals’ suggestions by which stress might be alleviated. This study also analyzed the extent to which future role expectations are related to the chronic stress that elementary principals perceive.

As I reflect on the results of this study, I do believe that these findings constitute a meaningful contribution to the body of research on the topic of principal stress, thus providing a deeper understanding of the daily struggles that elementary principals face. Furthermore, this study gave a voice to several principals who struggle with stress, and it is my hope that district personnel will consider this information as they make provisions for the future. If districts will invest the needed time and efforts into the development of a principal support plan, it will be possible to retain many great leaders in the elementary principalship instead of losing them to other types of roles.

As the researcher who has invested countless hours in the investigation and analysis of elementary principal burnout, I am coming away from this study with new professional relationships and ideas for my own elementary campus as a result of the time I was privileged
to spend with these eight research participants. It is not only my hope that this study will serve as a resource for those who desire to gain a deeper understanding regarding principal stress, but that it will serve as the spring board for future studies that continue to investigate ways to alleviate stress for elementary campus principals.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY SCRIPT
The purpose of this survey is to collect background and demographic information that will be analyzed and categorized in order to ascertain any commonalities among participants that might help to explain resultant response themes from those participants. Answers to the leadership preparation questions in this survey will ensure that all individuals meet criteria for participation in this study. Neither the background/demographic nor leadership participation information constitutes the focus of this research study. In order to protect the confidentiality of personally identifiable data, all data will be coded as they are collected. Furthermore, participants will never be identified. If you have any questions pertaining to this survey, please contact Joy Lovell at joy.lovell@pisd.edu. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.

Background and Demographic Data:

1. Please identify your gender below.
   a. Male
   b. Female

2. For how many total years, including the 2015-16 school year, have you held the role of Elementary Principal?

3. For how many years, including the 2015-16 school year, have you served in the role of Elementary Principal at your current campus?

4. Have you held the role of Elementary Principal in any other school districts besides the one in which you currently serve? If yes, please specify.

5. Have you served in the role of Elementary Principal at any other campuses within the same school district as your current campus assignment? If yes, please specify.
6. In what educational role(s) did you serve prior to receiving your first principalship?

   Please circle all roles that apply.
   a. Assistant Principal
   b. Classroom Teacher
   c. Bilingual Classroom Teacher
   d. Special Education Teacher
   e. Counselor
   f. Instructional Specialist/Coach
   g. Paraprofessional Role (specify)
   h. Other (specify)

7. Which of the circled roles above did you hold in the school district where you currently serve as principal? Please list.

8. At what age did you receive your first principalship position?

9. What percentage of students at your current campus has been identified by your district (based upon socio-economic status) as eligible for participation in a free or reduced lunch program?

Leadership Preparation:

10. Did you obtain your principal certification through a university preparation program?
   a. If yes, please name the university and program and/or degree completed.
   b. If not, please identify the preparation program that you utilized in order to receive your principal certification.
11. For how many years did you serve in other administrative roles (such as Administrative Intern, Dean of Students, Assistant Principal) before receiving your first principalship position?

12. Describe the leadership preparation you received from your district prior to receiving your first principalship.

13. Do you feel that you were adequately prepared for your first principalship?

14. If so, what factors contributed most significantly to your preparation?

15. If not, what preparation do you wish you had received?
Thank you for participating in this research study. Do you have any questions about the study or your participation before we begin? (Answer any questions at this time.) This interview is semi-structured, giving you the opportunity to provide as much information/detail as you feel is pertinent to the question. I will move directly from one question to the next. However, please stop me if you have any questions or need any clarification regarding a particular question. Again, I appreciate the time you are giving in order to participate in this research study.

Introductory Contextual Questions:

- Why did you desire to become a principal?
- Who most greatly influenced your decision to become a principal? Please explain.

1. Perceptions Regarding Causes of Stress:
   
a. Do you feel that the type of school in which you serve (size, economically disadvantaged percentage, etc.) impacts your stress level? Please explain.
   
b. As principal, what are the most significant causes of stress related to students?
   
c. As principal, what are the most significant causes of stress related to parents and the community?
   
d. As principal, what are the most significant causes of stress related to staff?
   
e. As principal, what are the most significant causes of stress related to supervisors and central office administration?
   
f. Do you feel that there are any other significant causes of principal stress that do not fit into any of the categories named thus far? Please explain.

2. Perceptions Regarding Level of Stress:
Before I ask you the next set of questions, let me provide the definitions for the levels of stress to which these questions refer. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you need for me to repeat these definitions at any time.

Definition of Stress Levels:

- **Low** – insignificant, easily sustainable over an indefinite period of time
- **Moderate** – significant, though sustainable with effort over an indefinite period of time
- **Chronic** – very significant, not a level that you desire to sustain or are able to sustain over an indefinite period of time

a. How would you rate your stress level in each of the stress-causing areas discussed in Question 1 (low, moderate, or chronic)?
   i. Type of school in which you serve (size, economically disadvantaged percentage, etc.)
   ii. Causes of stress related to students
   iii. Causes of stress related to parents and community
   iv. Causes of stress related to staff
   v. Causes of stress related to supervisors and central office administration
   vi. Causes of stress that did not fit into the categories defined by the researcher

b. How would you rate your overall level of chronic stress and/or burnout as an elementary principal – low, moderate, or chronic? Please explain.

3. Extent to Which Future Role Expectations Are Related to Perceptions of Stress:
   a. What impact do you feel that current challenges will have if you continue in your current role for the next five years? What about ten years from now?
b. Do you currently plan to continue serving as an elementary school principal until retirement?

c. If so, why?

d. If not, what are the reasons that would cause you to leave the profession and what type of job would you seek?

4. Perceptions Regarding Ways to Address Stress and Its Causes

a. What personal strategies help you in managing the stress related to your principal role? Please explain.

b. What campus-specific strategies help you in managing the stress related to your principal role? Please explain.

c. What district-implemented strategies help you in managing the stress related to your principal role? Please explain.

d. Are there any personal strategies that you would like to try in order to help with the management of stress related to your principal role?

e. Are there any campus-specific strategies that you would like to try in order to help with the management of stress related to your principal role?

f. Are there any district/central administration changes that you feel would alleviate some of the stress that you feel?

Concluding Contextual Questions:

- What have been your greatest successes as a principal?

- What factors contributed to these successes?

Thank you so much for your time today. Your responses are much appreciated.
REFERENCES


