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The Novice Assistant Principal: Support Needs in the Transition to the Administrative Role

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

by

Alyssa Nicole Maestas

2021
To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences & Education  

This dissertation, written by Alyssa Nicole Maestas, and entitled The Novice Assistant Principal: Support Needs in the Transition to the Administrative Role, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Florida International University, 2021
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DEDICATION

To my husband, daughter, and mother who provided unrelenting support and believed me when I most needed it. For my late father who would most certainly be proud.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My most sincere appreciation to the members of my dissertation committee. Dr. Joyce Fine has been supporting me since my early years as a graduate student over a decade ago and I appreciate her willingness to pick up right where we left off. Dr. Ricardo Garcia has provided invaluable feedback regarding educational leadership and introduced me to my theoretical framework. Dr. Daniel Saunders provided much-needed feedback to make this work the best it could be and I appreciate his insights and support. A final and most sincere thank you to my Major Professor, Dr. Tonette Rocco, without whom I would have been lost. I came to her with many questions and she supported my learning curve in the most wonderful way. I am grateful to her for helping me to achieve this goal and complete my doctoral journey.

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A final note of thanks to my colleagues and supporters whose help meant so much to me, and to Roxy Sanchez who was with me every step of the way.
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

THE NOVICE ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: SUPPORT NEEDS IN THE TRANSITION TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE

by

Alyssa Nicole Maestas

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Tonette Rocco, Major Professor

Novice assistant principals are expected to be ready to serve as key leaders in a school from the first day of their appointment as a school administrator. Research has shown that the role of assistant principal is multi-faceted, the pace of the job is unrelenting, the level of responsibility is overwhelming, and the number of new tasks encountered is daunting (Barnett, et al., 2012; Craft et al., 2016).

This study examined how novice assistant principals experienced support as they transitioned into the administrative role. The researcher used a phenomenological research design for the collection of data. The results indicated that novice assistant principals overwhelmingly relied on the informal support network of their assistant principal colleagues as they navigated the transition to their new administrative role. Participants also cited the effectiveness of relevant, systematic induction and support programs for novice administrators and meetings for all school administrators.
The conclusions reached in this qualitative phenomenological study suggest school district leaders consider the adoption of a research-based model of induction and professional development practices to support novice school leaders.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION ..............................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background to the Study....................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement..........................................</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study ......................................</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions .......................................</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework ....................................</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study ................................</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms ......................................</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ..................................</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Transition into Administration........................</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schlossberg’s Transition Theory...........................</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice Leaders ............................................</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief History of Assistant Principals’ Roles ............</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Current Role of Assistant Principals ................</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Psychological Impact of the Position ......</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanswered Calls for Support ................................</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODS ....................................................</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study ......................................</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions .......................................</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological Framework ................................</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Autobiography and Assumptions .............</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling Methods .........................................</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Demographics ..................................</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection ..........................................</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis ............................................</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Management .........................................</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity Measures ......................................</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESULTS .....................................................</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate Preparation ....................................</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges ...............................................</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Strategies ........................................</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Mechanisms .......................................</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Attributes ......................................</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS ................................</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to the Research Questions ....................</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participant Demographics</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Administration Context of Novice APs</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Position Held Immediately Before Becoming an AP</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Derivation of Interview Guide Questions</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teacher Leadership Responsibilities Prior to AP Position</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Preparatory Roles Outside the School Setting Prior to AP Position</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Commonly Mentioned Challenges of the New Role</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Sources of Informal Support</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This phenomenological study explored how novice assistant principals (APs) experienced support as they transitioned into their new administrative role (Armstrong, 2012; Craft et al., 2016). The intention of this study was to understand which formal and informal supports APs most relied upon during their first three years as school-site administrators. This chapter begins with the background to the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. Next, the theoretical framework, significance of the topic, definitions of terms, and the organization of this study will be provided.

Background to the Study

There can be little discussion of the experiences of novice assistant principals without first understanding the context in which the new administrators work. Experiences are inextricably linked to their surrounding context, particularly when one is undergoing a process of transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). In the education field, school leaders work in varied contexts. These contexts are often overlooked when discussing school leadership research (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Hallinger, 2018; Yalcin et al., 2016). In his Framework for Examining Instructional Management, Bossert et al. (1982) drew attention to the importance of context when considering the roles and responsibilities of school principals. Bossert et al. (1982) asserted that the behavior of school leaders is shaped by factors outside the school, including the size, composition, complexity, rules, and regulations of a given school district. Hallinger (2018) expanded
on Bossert’s model by proposing a broadened lens for examining the context of school leadership. Hallinger (2018) noted that the size of a school district influences the workload of employees, support structures can vary across school districts, and national policy mandates affect school districts differently.

National Context: Standardized Assessments

Also relevant to this study is the national context of standardized assessments in the United States. In December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) was signed into law by the President. The ESSA maintains a previous requirement for all states to administer standardized assessments in select grade levels. Those test scores are directly tied to federal funding for schools. Another key component of the ESSA is related to the duties of state governments. Each state is required to submit an accountability plan to the Education Department, including the following academic indicators for all students and subgroups of students on required annual assessments: proficiency on annual assessments, student growth on annual assessments, and one additional indicator of student success or school quality (Sharp, 2016). The additional indicator is typically chosen by the school district and all schools are usually required to use the same indicator. An example would be the academic proficiency of the lowest-performing twenty-five percent of students in each school, as indicated by student academic achievement scores on annual mandated standardized assessments. The subgroups include race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, and English language learners (ELLs). Student assessment data must be analyzed and reported according to the subgroups listed. Every three years, each state is required to use their
data to identify their lowest-performing five percent of schools as being “in need of improvement”, high schools with graduation rates that are less than 67 percent, and schools where any of the subgroups are underperforming (Association for Supervisions and Curriculum Development, 2016). Schools are given four years to reallocate their resources and school funding to meet the states’ improvement criteria. All data is required to be made public by means of annual report cards (Association for Supervisions and Curriculum Development, 2016). Through this process, student achievement outcomes on state-mandated standardized assessments are provided to the State Board of Education, legislative offices, and governor’s offices. The Commissioner of Education and the State Board of Education use student achievement outcome data to inform future education policy decisions (Florida Department of Education, 2020).

Due to the emphasis on results of standardized assessments, there exist additional challenges for school administrators serving school populations with traditionally disenfranchised students (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). The school district in which this research was conducted has high numbers of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and second-language learners. Spillane and Kenney (2012) emphasized that, “in the era of high stakes accountability tied to student performance, the threats to legitimacy [of the school] are greatest in schools enrolling poor students, students of color, and students for whom English is not a first language” (p. 548). Thus, accountability pressures are a consistent concern for school principals (Brown, 2018).
Number of Assistant Principals

Data from the most recent School and Staffing Survey (SASS) conducted by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics indicates that during the 2011-2012 school year there were a total of approximately 89,810 school principals leading schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The Florida Department of Education (2021) reported that there were 3,626 principals and 5,423 assistant principals working in Florida during the 2019-2020 school year.

The total number of public-school administrative staff working during the 2019-2020 school year Florida was 13,756 people. This number is comprised of school officials, district administrators, managers, consultants, supervisors of instruction, principals, assistant principals, deans, curriculum coordinators, and community education coordinators (Florida Department of Education, 2021). In Florida, each of the 67 counties has a corresponding school district. The following schools are also categories included in the state/district level report: Florida Virtual, Florida Atlantic University Lab School, Florida State University Lab School, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University Lab School, and the University of Florida Lab School, for a total of 75 districts included in the count of staff in Florida’s public schools. In Florida, 39.4% of all administrative staff are assistant principals, which represent the largest category of public-school administrative staff in the state (Florida Department of Education, 2021). The Florida school district in which this research was conducted contained the highest number of assistant principals in the state, representing 12.9% of the total number of assistant
principals in Florida (Florida Department of Education, 2021) and underscoring the importance of the focus of this research.

**District Context: School Composition**

The public-school system in which this research was conducted was a large, urban school district in Florida. The school district consists of the following compositions of public schools: primary learning centers, elementary schools, middle schools, K-8 centers, high schools, alternative schools, charter schools, magnet schools, specialized centers, virtual instruction programs, technical colleges, and adult education centers. Due to the size of the school district, there are over 300 public schools, many of which have student populations of greater than one thousand students. Each school has a principal serving as the administrative leader of the school and an assistant to the principal, known as the assistant principal (AP). Because of the large size of this urban school district, and the density of the student population, some of the larger schools in the district can have as many as four APs. Those APs are more specialized, focusing on specific areas of school leadership such as curriculum or school operations. In addition, schools with multiple APs sometimes assign responsibilities for specific groups of students, usually according to last name, so that they share the responsibilities of student supervision. For example, one AP may be responsible for students with last names ranging from A-J, the second AP may be responsible for students with last names ranging from L-S, and that pattern would continue depending on the number of APs at the school. With so many members of an administrative team, APs beginning their administrative career in a large school will likely have other administrators to whom they can turn for support.
Schools with a larger student body and many staff members typically have a different, more complex organizational structure than smaller schools. Large middle and high schools function like a complex organization. They typically have more managerial positions to keep pace with the demands of a large student population (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). In this school district, numerous schools have additional personnel who are charged with specific responsibilities within the school. Other leadership positions that exist within these school sites include English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) Compliance Liaison, activities director, athletic director, standardized assessments director or test chairperson, a magnet director who supervises specialized educational programs within the school, and academic coaches that focus on enhancing teaching and instruction in a specific subject area, such as reading, math, or science. Although they are not in the category of administrative positions, persons occupying academic coach positions work closely with the administrative team, do not typically have classroom responsibilities, and can serve as a support to the school administrators. Those positions often serve as a steppingstone towards the AP position. However, there are also schools in this district with less than 300 students enrolled. In those cases, schools with a small student population have one principal and one assistant principal comprising the administrative team. Schools with low student populations usually have less support staff to assist administrators at the school-site.

**Managing from the Middle**

Due to these persistent demands on the principal, principals are no longer able to serve as the sole instructional leader of the school, and in many cases assign tasks.
that responsibility with the assistant principal (Sigford, 2005). The importance of the AP role in relation to student achievement outcomes has recently become a focus in school leadership literature (Barnett et al., 2012, 2017). However, since most APs transition from a teaching role (Hohner & Riveros, 2017), navigating the differences in role between teacher and AP is challenging, particularly during times where the pressures to perform are so pronounced. If the former teacher does not have experience leading other adults, the challenge could be further exacerbated.

While it was previously believed that the principal operated independently to lead and manage the school, increasing literature suggests that principals rely on other school leaders, such as assistant principals, to help lead and manage instruction (Leithwood et al., 2007; Spillane et al., 2007). In the current educational climate, novice APs find themselves in a new, middle management position. They are situated between a principal who must ensure that student achievement data meet the expectations of demanding policy makers and teachers who are habituated to have professional discretion and autonomy related to matters of instruction (Spillane & Kenney, 2012).

**Problem Statement**

APs have a myriad of job responsibilities including student discipline (Fenning et al., 2008; Torres, 2012), staff management (Boyd, 2012; Tredway et al., 2007), parent communication (Oleszewski et al., 2012), administrative duties (Barnett, et al., 2012; Militello et al., 2015) and instructional leadership (Hilliard & Newsome, 2013). Novice APs frequently feel overwhelmed by the multitude of tasks they are expected to complete daily (Craft et al., 2016). They often lack the technical, practical, and experiential skills
necessary to maintain the balance between daily responsibilities, crisis management, and 
the ubiquitous school-wide and state-wide goal of raising student achievement outcomes 
(Armstrong, 2012).

A study of support needs of novice APs transitioning into their new administrative 
role is made more robust by examining the experience of that transition. However, few 
studies have included transitional issues faced by novice APs. Those that exist describe 
the first few years for APs as “survival” (Barnett et al., 2012, p. 101), “sink or swim” 
(Karpinski, 2008, p. 92) and “do it all by yourself” (Hohner & Riveros, 2017, p. 50).

Novice APs are expected to fulfill duties related to supervising personnel, 
instructional leadership, implementing district procedures, conflict management, working 
with students and meeting with parents (Armstrong, 2015; Beam et al., 2016). Most 
literature has found that APs are often delegated routine managerial tasks that are heavy 
in paperwork (Cranston, 2006; Militello et al., 2015) and they spend disproportionate 
amounts of time tackling student discipline issues (Fenning et al., 2008). Yet, the role of 
the AP also entails making time to work with teachers who are not using effective 
pedagogical practices (Barnett, et al., 2012).

Historically, professional development opportunities have not been designed to 
meet the needs of APs (Marshall et al., 1990). Although it has been recommended for 
decades that current and aspiring APs need clearly defined professional development to 
foster continual growth and purposeful leadership (Jayne, 1996), this call remains wholly 
unanswered. Minimal research has examined the supports novice APs need to be
successful in their new role (Barnett, et al., 2012; Peterson et al., 1987). Armstrong (2010) further asserts most new APs are likely “learning on the job” with little to no formal support. Frequently, the mentorship of a novice AP is informally delegated to the principal. However, that principal may not have the time or mentoring expertise to provide the intentional and systematic support required by a new AP (Searby et al., 2017).

Considering the increasingly complex context of the AP role, the “necessary training, mentorship, and support often have not preceded or accompanied these changes” (Grodzki, 2011, p. 1). While support programs for novice APs are now being implemented, research is needed to understand how novice APs experience support during their transition into school administration.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study will explore the experiences of novice APs as they transition into their new administrative role. For the purposes of this research, novice APs are those who have been in the position for three years or less. The aim of this study is to determine which forms of formal and informal support assistant principals most relied upon as they transitioned into their new administrative role.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question for the current study is: how do novice assistant principals experience support as they transition into their new administrative role? Secondary Research Questions include:
1. What are the most salient transitional issues faced by novice assistant principals?
2. To what extent do formal programs support the transition of novice assistant principals?
3. How do novice assistant principals experience informal support?
4. How do novice assistant principals experience support on a day-to-day basis?

**Theoretical Framework**

Exploring the transition from a teacher role to the managerial role of an AP is critical to understanding how novice APs experience support during their first three years as a school administrator. To examine the nature of this transition, this research will apply Schlossberg’s transition theory. Nancy Schlossberg (1981) theorized a model to represent “a framework in which transitions of all kinds – positive and negative, dramatic and ordinary – can be analyzed” (p. 3). Schlossberg (1981) posits that “a transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in ones’ behavior and relationships” (p. 5). Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) refined the theory and explained that, “the more the event or non-event alters an adult’s roles, routines, assumptions, and relationships, the more he or she will be affected by the transition” (p. 58). Schlossberg (2011) specifically addressed the intricacies of transitioning into a supervisory position by noting the following:

A promotion to a first supervisory job can be exciting, yet the new supervisor – whose roles, relationships, assumptions, and routines have been altered – will be disoriented while he or she figures out what is expected in the new role. (p. 59)
This research will use the lens of Schlossberg’s transition theory to understand the experiences of novice assistant principals as they transition into their new administrative role. Specific attention will be given to what Schlossberg (2011) deems to be the four key factors that shape how the individual copes with the transition: situation, self, support, strategies. The *situation* includes the trigger that initiated the transition, timing of the transition, source of the transition, the role change involved in the transition, duration of the change, previous experience related to the new role, and whether the change is permanent or temporary and anticipated or unanticipated (Schlossberg, 2011). The *self* refers to personal characteristics of the individual undergoing the transition and the psychological resources the person brings to the transition (Schlossberg, 2011). *Support*, a key component in Schlossberg’s transition theory as well as this research, can come from friends, family, intimate relationships, and institutions (Schlossberg, 2011). The *strategies* factor refers to those tactics employed by the individual as they respond to the new situation. Individuals can use strategies that attempt to modify and control the situation by changing the way it is approached by the individual and strategies that attempt to mitigate transitional stresses (Schlossberg, 2011).

**Significance of the Study**

By exploring the experiences of novice APs in their first three years, this research will contribute to development and refinement of induction programs for supporting novice APs. While there is a plethora of literature on the professional development needs of principals, there is little research on the professional development needs of APs (Allen & Weaver, 2014). There is even less research on effective ways to support novice APs,
who are arguably in the most need of guidance, resources, and professional development. A qualitative study by Craft et al., (2016) explored the induction experiences of six novice APs. During the interviews, participants consistently expressed a lack of support during the first year as an AP. They called for district leaders to build a network of experienced administrators that could be called upon as a resource. Specifically, they asked that the support be intentional, hands-on, and allow for much collaboration related to procedures, protocols, and mentorship (Craft et al., 2016). Experienced APs participating in an Assistant Principal Academy also referenced the critical role that networking, mentoring, peer support, and connection building in their academy had on their professional performance (Gurley et al., 2015).

This study will use a phenomenological approach to explore novice APs’ experiences of support in a large urban school district in the southeast United States. Through interviews with APs in their first 3 years as school administrators, this study will contribute to the limited body of research on the formal and informal support APs experience as they transition into their new role.

In summary, the research presently available has described the roles and responsibilities of APs. The adversities of APs are well-documented, as is their need for support in a variety of forms. The literature has recently become more targeted, delving deeper into the formal and informal support needs of APs, both novice and experienced. What is not yet clear in the current literature is how novice APs experience support as they transition into their new administrative role.
Definition of Terms

Assistant principals refer to “staff members assisting the administrative head of the school. This classification also includes assistant principals for curriculum and administration” (K-20 Education Code, 2020).

Instructional Leadership entails a clearly communicated mission, the monitoring of classroom instruction and student progress, and the creation of a school climate that is conducive to learning and teaching (Murphy, 1988).

Transition is “any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38)

Summary

Chapter 1 provides the background to the study, the problem statement, and the purpose of the study. It then outlines the research questions, and gives an overview of the theoretical framework, and explains the significance of the study. The chapter concludes with a definition of terms. Chapter 2 begins with a description of the transition into administration, a complete explanation of Schlossberg’s transition theory, and a look at novice leaders. It then provides a brief history of assistant principals’ roles, the current role of assistant principals, and the personal and psychological impact of the position. The chapter concludes with a section about unanswered calls for support. Chapter 3 presents the purpose of the study, the research questions, the phenomenological framework, and the researcher’s autobiography and assumptions. It then provides sampling methods, participant demographics, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. The chapter concludes with a description of data management and integrity
measures. Chapter 4 presents the results in terms of deliberate preparation, challenges, coping strategies, support mechanisms, and personal attributes. Chapter 5 discusses the responses to the research questions, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and limitations of the study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The transition from teacher to assistant principal (AP) comes with many obstacles. To overcome adversity and help accomplish the overarching school goal of increasing students’ academic proficiency new APs need support. To convey the specific support needs of novice assistant principals, this literature review will describe the transition into administration, Schlossberg’s transition theory and novice leaders. Following that will be a presentation of literature related to the history of APs’ roles, the current role of AP, and the personal and psychological impacts of the position. The chapter concludes with a section about unanswered calls for support in the literature.

The Transition into Administration

Novice APs exist in an environment where their relationship to other roles in the workplace has quickly changed (Hartzell et al., 1995). Former relationships with peers and other teachers transition to a relationship of supervisor and subordinate. Further straining that transition is the unspoken assumption of the former teacher peer group that the new administrator will be a teacher-advocate, which is not always possible for an AP (Reed & Himmler, 1985). Hartzell et al. (1995) succinctly explained “it is very difficult, for example, to simultaneously be a sounding board or confidante for employees and still be responsible for their evaluation” (p. 161). Those conflicts that arise from the role transition within the workplace are often unexpected by novice APs (Barnett, et al., 2012).
Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

Schlossberg’s transition theory defines a transition as an event or a non-event that changes relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles (Schlossberg, 1981). Transition theory purports that while transitions may differ, the structure for understanding transitions is the same. Schlossberg’s transition theory uses a 4 S System to understand the structure of transitions including three primary parts.

4 S System

Individuals navigating transitions are often confused and in need of support (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Anderson et al. (2012) painted a picture of the essence of transition by delving into the Chinese language. They explained that the word ‘crisis’ in Chinese is a combination of the symbol for danger and the symbol for opportunity. The literal translation is *opportunity riding a dangerous wind* (as cited in Corlett & Millner, 1993), which aptly encapsulates the complex feelings that can accompany a transition. As individuals navigate the complex process of transitioning, they utilize different coping resources. These resources are collectively known as the 4 S System. The 4 S’s include self, situation, strategies, and support (Schlossberg, 2011). Each of these four factors will be detailed in the next section.

Self

According to Schlossberg’s transition theory, the *self* refers to the personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources that a person brings to a transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Personal and demographic characteristics are comprised of an individuals’ socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, culture, age and
stage of life, and state of health. Psychological resources have been defined as “personality characteristics that people draw upon to help them withstand threats” (as cited in Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 5). Psychological resources include optimism, ego development, commitments, spirituality, and resilience (Anderson et al., 2012). These factors have been shown to have a relationship with how a person perceives and assesses life during transitions (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988).

The effectiveness with which a person moves through a transition and adjusts to change can depend partly on socioeconomic status and the financial resources a person possesses (Schlossberg, 2011). Although the relationship between transition and gender is complex, transition theory posits that it is a factor to consider when exploring how individuals experience transition. Gender has been researched in terms of communication, expression of emotions, problem solving, wages, work expectations, and power, all of which can be factors in a transition process (Anderson et al., 2012). Ethnicity and culture are also a potentially relevant consideration in the ability of a person to navigate transitions. Additionally, strengths stemming from family or community relationships can empower individuals during their process of transition and can serve as an important resource. The inverse can also be true (Schlossberg, 1981). Transition theory recommends that if age is considered in discussions about a transition, age should be viewed in terms that are not just chronological. Age can be discussed in terms of how one is functioning compared to other persons in the same age bracket, in terms of the capacity to respond to tasks, and/or the extent to which a person acts in conformance with societal expectations of that age (Schlossberg, 1981). State of health is
described in transition theory as a potential factor to consider as well as a possible source of stress during a transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

Other factors included in the category of self are related to an individuals’ psychological resources and can include optimism, ego development, commitments, spirituality, and resilience. Optimism is included in transition theory because optimism can be related to how people approach challenges, react to situations, and view their level of control in their outcomes (Anderson et al., 2012). Ego development is an idea originally conceptualized by Loevinger (1976), and it describes the level of maturity of a person. A low level of ego development leads to conformist behaviors including not questioning instructions and a desire for certainty. Individuals with a higher level of ego development are autonomous, tolerant of ambiguity, and are more critical. Considering the level of ego development of an individual experiencing a transition can allow for a better and more appropriate support response (Anderson et al., 2012). Commitments can be interpersonal, altruistic, competence-based, or self-protective. Interpersonal commitments focus on relationships, altruistic commitments focus on working for others, competence-based commitments focus on self-improvement, and self-protection commitments focus on survival. An individual’s primary commitment can influence how that person adapts to a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Spirituality is another aspect of self that transition theory considers. Spirituality has been defined in terms of religious beliefs as well as a way to seek meaning, connections, and purpose in life (Burke et al., 1999). Transition theory points to potential relationships between spirituality and coping ability and suggests that in some cases spirituality could support an individual coping
with a transition. When exploring transitions, it is also important to consider a person’s resilience. Resilience has been defined as the ability to endure a challenge, recover from a hardship, or become stronger when facing adversity (Bosworth & Waltz, 2005). Depending on the individual, it can be assumed that some or many of the factors of self will be a consideration in exploring an individual’s response to a transition and how support is experienced during that transition.

**Situation**

Schlossberg’s transition theory suggests that experiences of individuals in transition vary according to the following factors related to an individual’s situation: trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, and previous experience with a similar transition (Schlossberg, 1981). An individual’s transition experience can be affected by one or all of the factors related to their situation.

A trigger suggests how the transition was initiated, whether it was anticipated or unanticipated, and if it was an event or a nonevent (Schlossberg, 2011). The timing of a transition refers to how the transition relates to social aspects of one’s life. Transition theory notes that most adults have expectations about when certain events related to family, career, and oneself should occur. If these events occur in alignment with one’s expectations, the timing could be considered as “good”. If a transition happens at a time that an individual feels is not in alignment with expectations or one’s social life, the transition could be viewed by the individual as having “bad” timing. Anticipated and unanticipated transitions can occur at worse or better times for the individual, which could make the transition process easier or harder (Schlossberg, 1981). Control has
implications for the initiation of the transition as well as the individuals’ response to the transition. If an individual makes a thoughtful decision to initiate a transition, there may be a feeling of control over their situation. If an individual is forced into a transition by an outside person or circumstance, there may be a feeling of loss of control. Regardless of the level of control an individual feels regarding the initiation of the transition, a person can have control over the response to the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). The degree to which a person can control their reactions to a transition can have implications for how the challenges of the transition are navigated.

Many transitions involve role change, which is a key aspect in understanding the effect of a transition (Schlossberg, 1981). Hohner and Riveros (2017) described role change as the decision to leave one role and enter a new role. A new role change can be more or less challenging depending on if the new role is seen as a loss or a gain, is negative or positive, or clear expectations and norms for the new holder of the role are made apparent (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). The anticipated duration of a transition can also have implications in role change. A permanent transition will likely be viewed and experienced differently than a temporary transition. If an individual is uncertain about the duration of a change, particularly if it is a desired change that may not be permanent, a great deal of stress may be experienced (Anderson et al., 2012).

Previous experience with a similar transition is a component in transition theory. A person who has previously had a positive experience with a similar transition will likely adjust well to a new transition of a related nature (Schlossberg, 1981). Conversely, a person who has had a negative experience with a similar transition could feel defeated,
uncertain, and less prepared to cope with the new transition. In the same vein, if one has an acquaintance who has experienced a similar transition, one may expect a similar positive or negative transition experience, thus affecting the approach to the transition and related support needs (Anderson et al., 2012).

**Strategies**

In Schlossberg’s transition theory, *strategies* refer to the coping mechanisms an individual employs during a transitional period (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). One definition of coping is “the overt and covert behaviors individuals use to prevent, alleviate or respond to stressful situations” (George & Siegler, 1981, p. 37). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) delineate the three following types of coping strategies: responses that modify the situation, responses that control the situation and responses that manage stress. Responses that modify the situation include problem-solving behaviors, self-reliance, and advice-seeking. Responses that attempt to control the meaning of the situation include mentally diminishing struggles and minimizing the perceived negative effects of a situation. It also includes devaluing the situation and affording a higher value to another area of life in which one feels more successful (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Responses that attempt to manage the stress include emotional discharge and passive forbearance. Emotional discharge can include exercise, confiding in a spouse, spending time with trusted friends, or any mix of strategies an individual undertakes to relieve stress. Passive forbearance is the avoidance of situations or persons that cause distress.
Support

Schlossberg (2011) believes that the support available during a time of transition is imperative to one’s feeling of well-being and noted that support is often relied upon as a key component in handling stress. Types of support outlined in transition theory are organized according to their sources. They include family units, intimate relationships, networks of friends, and institutions (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). The relationships with members of one’s family, particularly if that relationship includes support, understanding, trust, and sharing of confidences, can be an important support resource during a challenging transition. Likewise, they can be an added source of stress if members of the family are not supportive during a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). A person’s network of friends can also be an important support system during transition. Friends can provide encouragement and help a person form a positive outlook on their situation (Schlossberg, 1981). The institution an individual works for can also provide a source of support. That support can come informally from other members of the institution or formally through programs designed to provide practical help and information during a work transition (Schlossberg, 2011).

Transition Theory and Career Transitions

Previous studies have used Schlossberg’s transition theory to understand career changes (Browne et al., 2018; Burns, 2010; Laser, 2019; Walker-Donnelly et al., 2019). Browne et al. (2018) conducted focus group interviews with medical educators that were previously employed as medical practitioners or medical researchers and who had recently transitioned to the role of a medical educator. Browne et al. (2018) used the four
components of transition theory, which include self, situation, strategies, and support, to guide their deductive analysis of the participants’ transition into their new career. In their analysis, they noted several key factors within each of the four components that were intertwined in the transition experience. They asserted that the ‘4 S’ framework was an appropriate structure to use in exploring career-related transitions. Burns (2010) wrote an article to examine transition models and their cross-disciplinary useability. Burns (2010) contended that the model of Schlossberg shows “the social complexity in truly understanding transition generally, and career transition in particular” (p. 45). It was suggested that transition theory was appropriate to be used in the context of discussing career transitions as well as in a more active context as a tool for career consultants to use when working with clients. In a similar analysis of transition theories as they relate to career transitions, Walker-Donnelly et al. (2019) explained that Schlossberg’s transition theory can be used to assess where a person is within a career transition by encouraging reflection related to transitional supports. In an article that focused on transition management and career planning, Laser (2019) investigated the plausibility of using the underpinnings of transition theory to analyze careers objectively and subjectively. In the discussion, Laser (2019) noted that the use of transition theory when discussing career transitions is appropriate because it acknowledges the idea that employees may contend with transitions in different ways and it highlights the importance of employees’ subjective perceptions. Haim and Amdur (2016) explored career transitions in the education field. Their qualitative study investigated the concerns and professional challenges of 30 first-year teachers that had recently transitioned from another career and
were participating in an alternative induction program for second-career teachers. The study also explored their perspectives of the support provided to them by the institution. Haim and Amdur (2016) use Schlossberg’s transition theory to explore participants’ transition into the teaching profession. By using Schlossberg’s transition theory as a model for their analysis, they were able to identify various coping strategies that the second career teachers used to contend with the challenges they faced. Schlossberg’s transition theory also provided a framework for exploring the perceptions of the second career teachers as they related to the institutional support they received and how they used that support throughout the first year.

In her qualitative study exploring the transition from teaching to administration, Armstrong (2015) acknowledged the importance of the interaction between external context of the transition and the novice AP. To emphasize this point, Armstrong (2015) turned to Schlossberg’s notion that transitions do not occur in isolation. Rather, they happen in a specific context and reflect the individual experiencing the transition. Armstrong (2015) found that during their transition novice APs experienced feeling a lack of institutional support, a dramatic shift in their role and responsibilities, and challenges related to the volume, pace, and intensity of their workload. Armstrong (2015) noted that the participants intentionally sought others with whom they could build collaborative relationships such as AP colleagues and other school leaders. Since the underpinnings of the Schlossberg’s transition theory focus on how individuals respond to changes, and incorporate contextual elements such as situation and support, and internal factors such as self and strategies, it is believed that Schlossberg’s transition theory is an
appropriate theory to use in exploring the experiences of novice APs in their first year as school administrators.

**Novice Leaders**

Leadership is a multidimensional role that is based in social structures and involves constituents in various contexts (Day, 2000). Novices entering their first leadership role face new challenges and situations as they make the transition from an individual actor to one who holds a leadership position (Baheti et al., 2018). Leaders transitioning into their first management role are more likely to encounter new situations and have more to learn than experienced managers transitioning to another management position (Day et al., 2014), and new managers are often faced with an increased workload from their previous position (Sillett, 2015). As they are learning their new role, novice managers are expected to simultaneously serve as a leader to their new team, support individual team members, and adhere to organizational policies, familiar or not (Kilroy & Dundon, 2015). Key components in the transition to a management role include leadership development, the formation of a new leadership identity, and the role of previous experience.

**Leadership Development**

Making the transition into a first management position is one of the hardest challenges a novice manager will face (Plakhotnik et al., 2011). To support novice managers in their transition, organizations can utilize leadership development programs. Leadership development programs have been described as programs that are formulated to increase leader knowledge, capacity, and skills (Day, 2000). Specifically, leadership
development programs are often created to impart new knowledge and produce positive behavioral changes in daily leadership tasks (Day, 2000). Leadership development programs can be especially beneficial to novice managers who are contending with new expectations (Park & Faerman, 2019).

Organizations appear to be aware of the importance of training new managers in an effective, efficient manner (Day et al., 2014). In a study of industry professional development activities, Ho (2016) found that a large portion of industry training budgets were designated for leadership training. However, research indicates that novice managers are not always provided with adequate training and support to facilitate their transition into a leadership role (Brotherton, 2010; Sillett, 2015). Organizations have reported a deficit in leadership skills in their employees (Lacerenza et al., 2017). To ease the challenge of the transition, it has been recommended that, whenever possible, leadership development programs be tailored to the specific developmental needs of the leader (Day et al., 2014). Novice managers face specific challenges including high expectations from new supervisors and the need to foster positive relationships with new coworkers. As they address these challenges, novice managers are also experiencing a dramatic shift in their work identity, from an individual actor to a supervisor (Hill, 2019).

**Burgeoning Leadership Identity**

While attending to new management tasks and responsibilities, novice managers are also developing their identity as a leader (Austin et al., 2013; Park & Faerman, 2019). Leader identity can be conceptualized as the extent to which a person self-identifies as a leader and the centrality of that role in one’s life (Day et al., 2009). Having a leader
identity can be a motivational force to think and behave in the manner of a leader (Day et al., 2009), but this period of transition can be challenging for novice managers. In Park and Faerman’s (2019) study of newly promoted managers, participants expressed struggles related to the ‘exit period’, when they realized that their expectations of their new job were not as accurate as they believed they would be. They engaged in a journey to make sense of their new work environment, the new set of expectations others held for them as managers, and challenged previous assumptions about their new role. Park and Faerman (2019) asserted that the novice managers’ leader identity was not yet stable, especially for those who were just beginning their transition. Enhancing the novice managers’ uncertainty during this period of transition was the difference in skills needed to be a successful individual actor and the skills needed to be a successful leader of a team. Oftentimes, organizations promote employees who excel at their job. However, the capabilities needed to be an exemplary individual worker may be very different than the capabilities needed to be an effective leader of a team (Belker et al., 2018). Novice managers must develop certain leadership-minded attitudes, gain leadership experiences, and develop their overall knowledgebase to be a high performing manager (Plakhotnik, 2017).

Previous Experience

Novice managers enacting their first management position may have had related previous experience in a prior role. A study by Bettin and Kennedy (1990) suggested that experience related to relevant skills, knowledge, and practice should be considered when discussing the types of experiences that enhance the development of a new manager.
Baheti et al. (2018) emphasized the potential benefits of advanced preparation for a management role including participation in various national, institutional, or departmental committees and seeking out a mentor. Plakhotnik (2017) took it a step further by advocating for a ‘preparation period’ to take place before the new leadership management begins. The ‘preparation period’ is necessary because support that is provided for first-time managers takes place after the promotion to the new position. By that time, novice managers have begun in their new management role and thus have already encountered their initial challenges, engaged in their first disputes, and made their first mistakes (Plakhotnik, 2017).

**Brief History of Assistant Principals’ Roles**

Many schools have APs who serve as a key leader in the school. Yet, a comprehensive, published history of the role of AP proves to be elusive. A Google Scholar search using phrases including “history of assistant principal”, “assistant principalship history”, and “histography of assistant principal” yield only one publication: Glanz (1994b) wrote *Where did the assistant principalship begin? Where is it headed?* A deeper search using academic journals yields more publications by Glanz on the history of the assistant principalship, which are grounded in primary sources from the 1800’s (Glanz, 1991; Glanz, 1994a; Glanz, 1994b). Other than work by Glanz, or work that directly refers to Glanz’s research, short histories can be found in the introductions to journal articles and dissertations, as well as embedded in articles about the history of the principalship. Information on the history of the assistant principal role is challenging to find and often incomplete. What is known is that the creation of the AP
role evolved out of the need to support principals. That evolution will be briefly outlined in the following paragraphs.

Before school principals became commonplace, the superintendent oversaw the daily functions of a school, as well as interacted with students and teachers during school visits. However, with the intensification of urbanization and the growing school system, so grew the need for a school manager on-site every day (Glanz, 1994a). Thus, the creation of the principal teacher position, also called the head teacher (Goodwin et al., 2005; Rousemaniere, 2007).

During the early 1800’s, the principal teacher had teaching responsibilities for part of the day and school management tasks for the other part of the day (Kafka, 2009). Sears (1935) summarized a study in 1935 by Pierce which examined 597 school reports from 1833 to 1933. Sears (1935) outlined the progression from “principal teacher” to “principal”, which was a result of school growth, the necessity of maintaining school records, teacher training initiatives, and coordinated instructional efforts (p. 550). By the 1920’s and 1930’s, the responsibilities of the principal shifted away from direct inspections, classroom supervision, and instructional development, and assumed a more managerial position (Glanz, 1994a).

During this time, “supervisor” positions were created to assist the principal in overseeing the education of students, and these positions were the predecessor to the contemporary role of the assistant principal. While these positions may have had different names in different school districts, they seemed to have similar supervisory functions (Glanz, 1991). Two common supervisor roles were the “general supervisor” and the
“special supervisor”. The special supervisor, usually female, was relieved of part of the teaching duties to assist less-experienced teachers in mastering subject-matter. The general supervisor, usually male, assisted the principal with the daily operations of the school (Glanz, 1994b). By the early 1930’s, the position of the special supervisor began to disappear, and by the 1940’s and 1950’s the general supervisor began to be widely referred to as the “assistant principal” (Glanz, 1994b).

Even though the AP position began as a general supervisor in the early 1900’s, and a close resemblance to the current AP position existed in the 1940’s and 1950’s, it was not until 1970 that the first nationwide research about the assistant principalship was conducted. In 1970, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) surveyed 1,270 APs to provide an overview of the role and the people who held that role (as cited in Glanz, 1994b). In that study, the APs ranked a list of 25 duties according to which they would consider as their “chief duties”. The results showed that over 90% of the APs ranked the following roles as being a large part of their daily job: student discipline, lunch duty, school scheduling/coverages, ordering textbooks, parental conferences, assemblies, administrative duties, and articulation. The APs were then asked to rank the same 25 duties according to which they felt were the most important for the school. Over 90% of the APs ranked the following roles as being most important in their contribution to the school: teacher training, staff development, curriculum development, evaluation of teachers, and instructional leadership (as cited in Glanz, 1994b).

Just as there were decades ago, there are currently a multitude of roles that the AP is expected to fulfill daily (Mitchell et al., 2017; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). These roles
will be outlined in the next section. Following that will be literature on the personal and psychological impact of the assistant principalship and a presentation of unanswered calls for support.

**The Current Role of Assistant Principals**

Despite decades of research that have emphasized the importance of APs, the position continues to be that of a loosely defined managerial role (Armstrong, 2010). In an examination of roles that APs are currently expected to fulfill, Barnett et al. (2012) highlighted the following areas of responsibility of beginning and experienced APs: curriculum and instruction, data analysis, policies and procedures, problem solving, supervising personnel, working with students, meeting with parents, knowledge of policies and procedures, leadership, and conflict management. In another study aimed at defining the position of the AP, Hausman et al. (2002) surveyed 125 APs. They reported that APs spent their time on the following roles, presented in order of most frequency of involvement to least frequency of involvement: student management, interactions with education hierarchy (other leaders and educators), personnel management, public relations, professional development, resource management, and instructional leadership. Similar roles are described by other researchers (Armstrong, 2012; Mackinnon & Milne, 2007). Descriptions of the role suggest that the goal of instructional leadership is often overshadowed by daily managerial tasks. For the purposes of this study, literature on the following common duties of APs will be summarized: (a) student discipline, (b) staff management, (c) communication with parents, (d) administrative duties, and (e) instructional leadership.
Student Discipline

Student discipline is a matter that falls primarily into the hands of the AP and is a task that is time consuming and emotionally taxing, but imperative to the daily operations of a school. Administrators spend disproportionate amounts of time tackling student discipline issues (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Fenning et al., 2008). An administrator of an urban middle school explained, “behavior issues in schools are not just occasional; they are daily, hourly, and everywhere” (Boyd, 2012, p. 63).

Now more than ever, the general population believes that student behavior is out of control (Simonsen et al., 2008). A recent Phi Delta Kappa poll found that the public cited student behavior problems as the second most concerning issue for local public schools (lack of funding was the first) (Richardson & Jacques, 2018). Even for an experienced AP, effectively managing student discipline is problematic. New APs have an even more difficult time when it comes to student discipline because they have much uncertainty when it comes to making so many daily, public decisions (Tredway et al., 2007). In a study of novice urban APs, a participant expressed the dilemma as follows:

It’s about being the middleman. We don’t write the rules; we don’t make the legislation; we don’t do anything. All we can do is get the rules handed to us and are expected to implement them and then in the meantime make sure that everybody’s happy . . . . See where you can do the least damage and yield the most positive growth. (Tredway et al., 2007, p. 199)
Many times, particularly at the secondary school level, student discipline can also become a legal matter, which increases the stakes for APs in their decision-making (Torres, 2012).

**Staff Management**

Often a conflict that begins as a student discipline concern evolves into a staff management matter, and there is evidence to suggest that APs experience this as competing commitments (Tredway et al., 2007). There is a paradoxical relationship between the teacher and the student when it comes to matters of student discipline. Many APs find that they can either please the student or the teacher, but not both. Boyd (2012) contended that, “In no other area of education is the gulf between teachers and administrators wider than in the area of student discipline” (p. 62). Many APs view themselves as student-advocates; an administrator that strives to achieve whatever is in the best interest of the students. However, skilled APs also realize that the students eventually leave the school, and the teachers remain. This is a perspective that novice APs usually do not fully embrace and is one that comes with experience. It is difficult, if not impossible, to lead teachers who have lost faith in their AP or feel that they are not supported by their AP (Tredway et al., 2007). This situation is exacerbated when an AP knows that a teacher is in the wrong. Tredway et al., (2007) conducted rare research on a leadership induction program for novice school administrators. Their interviews focused solely on the disciplinarian aspect of the new role. Regarding the challenging situation an AP faces when dealing with an incident involving a student and a teacher, a participant described the following example of a PE teacher at his school who made a “serious
misjudgment”. The PE teacher taunted two male students who were not participating in the physical education activity, telling them that they were “behaving like girls” and that they “should stop kissing”. At that point, other students joined in the teasing. The PE teacher denied saying those things, putting the administrator in a difficult position. The administrator had to make sure the students felt supported without undermining the authority of the teacher (p. 217).

In addition to working through conflict with teachers, the AP role also includes supervising teachers’ pedagogy and the evaluation of teachers (Hilliard & Newsome, 2013). APs supervise teachers to make sure they are developing and implementing rigorous lessons, adequately preparing students to master grade-level concepts, supporting struggling students, enriching the education of students performing above grade-level, and maintaining a classroom environment conducive to education. One duty of the AP is to evaluate the effectiveness of the teachers in the school. In a study of 103 novice and experienced APs respondents reported “being unprepared” to handle the expectations of classroom observations and teacher evaluations (p. 110).

Parent Communication

The lofty but necessary goal of all education, and thus the goal of the assistant principalship, is the education of all students. This goal can rarely be accomplished without the support of the students’ parents. An uninvolved parent can be an indicator of other difficulties a student is likely having. Conversely, a parent who is actively involved in the education of their child may occasionally let their emotions get the better of them. Both instances are extreme situations with parents that would likely necessitate the
involvement of the AP. Glanz (1994) surveyed APs in New York and found that 90 percent of participants reported that handling parent complaints was one of their main duties. Furthermore, contentious issues when working with dissatisfied parents was a chief challenge expressed by both novice and experienced APs in a similar study by Barnett et al., (2012). Specifically, their unease in dealing with conflict was related to confronting the anger of parents and corresponding emotional outbursts. In reflecting on readiness to manage conflict, one novice AP participant in the study stated, “I was also least prepared to deal with the number of angry parents and the level of their anger, and how quick they are to go to my principal and central office” (p. 110).

**Administrative Duties**

One aspect of the roles of the AP is the administrative duty of completing paperwork. Many APs work late or during the weekend to keep up with the constant demands of bureaucratic requirements (Armstrong, 2012). During their research on the job realities of beginning and experienced APs, Barnett et al. (2012) found that many respondents cited excessive demands on their time and expressed frustration about having so much paperwork to complete. One novice AP succinctly summed up the situation saying that “time constraints seem to be my biggest obstacle. I just feel like I can never finish one thing before something else is on my desk. I would like to spend more time in the classrooms interacting with both teachers and students, but there never seems to be any time” (p. 104). Further exacerbating the ever-present demands of administrative paperwork is the limited autonomy that APs often feel they have over their daily tasks (Cranston, 2006; Militello et al., 2015).
Instructional Leadership

The term ‘instructional leadership’ is commonly defined as the practices that include planning, evaluation, and improvement of teaching and learning within a school (Robinson et al., 2008). Many researchers believe that the responsibility of instructional leadership falls on the school principal (du Plessis, 2013; Hallinger, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003; Vogel, 2018). Using the term “instructional leadership” (and all derivations of the word “leader”), a recent search of two of the largest educational research databases, ERIC (ProQuest) and PsychInfo, resulted in approximately 4,500 articles related to principals and instructional leadership. Zero articles listed “assistant principal” as one of the main subjects related to instructional leadership. When searching for research related to assistant principals and instructional leadership, one must dive into articles falling under the larger categories of “administrator role”, “administrator attitudes” and “educational administration”. However, that does not mean that assistant principals have not in the past, or do not currently, serve as key instructional leaders in their schools. Practicing APs continually express the importance and necessity of their role as instructional leaders, as will be presented in the following paragraphs.

The National Educational Association (1970) conducted the first nationwide study about APs (as cited in Glanz, 1994b). The study surveyed 1,270 APs with the goal of generating an accurate description of the AP position. In that study, over 90% of the participating APs mentioned instructional leadership responsibilities as one of their most important tasks. A recent state-wide study of APs in Alabama revealed that out of the 461 participants, 458 said they were responsible for some or many aspects of instructional
leadership in their school (Serby, 2017). Research by Pounder (2011) reported that effective AP leadership programs must maintain a focus on growing instructional leadership capabilities. Michael Shepherd, the 2011 National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)/Vicro National Assistant Principal of the Year, stated his belief that “the assistant principal is first and foremost an instructional leader” (p. 17). He elaborated that, “I also have other duties, which include discipline for more than 600 tenth graders, after-school activities, suspension, and parent concerns, but my primary focus is to support best teaching practices” (Umphrey, 2011, p. 17).

**Assistant Principals’ Desire to be Instructional Leaders**

Although they have numerous other roles, many APs express a desire to help the principal lead the instruction in their school. In a review of literature related to instructional leadership and APs, Scoggins and Bishop (1993) found that APs wanted to be more than the primary disciplinarian for the school. In that study, participants expressed a desire for a more meaningful set of responsibilities related to the instructional operations of the school. In another review of instructional leadership research, Oleszewski et al. (2012) determined that APs almost consistently preferred work that involved instructional tasks as opposed to managerial roles and student discipline. Similarly, Shore and Walshaw (2018) found that “the desire to make a difference in education” and “the opportunity to innovate and contribute to school development and change” provided high levels of job satisfaction for APs (p. 315). In a study of real versus ideal duties of APs, Cranston et al. (2004) found that 21% of participating APs expressed that they already spend a “great deal of time” on tasks related to instructional leadership,
and 69% said they would ‘ideally’ like to spend “a great deal of time” on instructional tasks. The most recent research related to APs and instructional leadership shows a preference of APs for meaningful, instructional leadership tasks.

**The Need for Assistant Principals to be Instructional Leaders**

Principals have a strong need for APs to serve as instructional leaders (Lovely, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oliver, 2003, 2005; Thompson, 2010). When outlining his Framework for Instructional Leadership, Murphy (1988) described the challenges that principals face due to the many leadership roles they are expected to fulfill as the head of the school. He posited that the nature of a principals’ job often precludes their ability to operate as the sole instructional leader in a school. Kaplan and Owings (1999) noted that the current high stakes testing environment and the associated accountability the principal experiences lend credence to the argument for APs to function as instructional leaders. To raise student achievement and maintain high levels of academic accomplishments in the current high stakes testing environment, APs need to be adept instructional leaders (Sigford, 2005).

It is not only researchers and practitioners who are noticing the relationship between strong instructional leaders and student achievement goals (Robinson et al., 2008). Politicians and the public are increasingly holding school leaders accountable for school effectiveness, student learning, and achievement (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Horng et al., 2009; Pont et al., 2008). The task of instructional leadership cannot be ignored or given short shrift: the evidence shows that students achieve more in schools with strong instructional leadership (Louis & Robinson, 2012).
To support the principal with school-wide instructional leadership, Barnett et al., (2012) contend that “as schools continue to face academic performance demands . . . the role of the AP must evolve from the traditional perspective of disciplinarian and manager to a perspective in which enhancing the instructional program of a school is at the forefront” (p. 92). Hilliard and Newsome (2013) agree that there should be a shift in expectations of the tasks and role of APs. They argue that APs should no longer be viewed solely as disciplinarian facilitators, hall and bus monitors, cafeteria supervisors and conflict coordinators, but as a key instructional leader as in the school.

**Novice APs Need Support to be Successful Instructional Leaders**

APs are beginning to support principals with instruction leadership, but who is supporting the novice APs? Harris and Lowery (2004) contend that the contemporary position of AP nearly matches the complexity of the principals’ role. Armstrong (2010) surveyed 290 APs and found that the variety and number of responsibilities APs have impedes their ability to focus on instructional leadership, which is a complex task unto itself. Using a meta-analysis of over 50 studies on instructional leadership, Marzano et al. (2005) concluded that modern school leaders must possess specific curriculum and pedagogical knowledge to be an effective instructional leader, including the ability to recognize high quality instruction and provide constructive and actionable feedback to teachers. Researchers agree that for APs to contribute to the task of instructional oversight at their school, they need professional development related to instructional leadership best practices (Drago-Severson & Aravena, 2011; Lovely, 2004; Oliver,
Similarly, Searby et al. (2017) found that novice APs reported that they would greatly benefit from mentoring in instructional leadership practices.

**Personal and Psychological Impact of the Position**

Challenges related to instruction and curriculum are not the only hurdles that novice APs face. Although many APs prepare for the upcoming role change, the new daily responsibilities encountered upon entering the role can be daunting struggle. An examination of the research on issues APs face shows several recurring themes: workload, task management, and emotional exhaustion. The workload of an AP is constant, often unpredictable, and necessitates many working hours per week. It is exacerbated for novice APs who are learning everything as they go, often without appropriate support. Armstrong (2010) aptly contextualized the workload of a novice assistant as follows:

... a combination of pervasive socialization rites and inadequate support at the successive phases of their administrative passage created unnecessary transitional strain and increased the novices’ vulnerability to external pressures. Inappropriate professional certification programs neglected to prepare them for the nature and demands of this socialization passage and its physical and psychosocial impacts. In addition, district “sink or swim” initiation rites, in the form of difficult challenges, long hours, and poor support, created disempowering conditions that violated their employee rights. Furthermore, the resulting survival-of-the-fittest mentality fostered a climate of intolerance that impacted vulnerable populations negatively. The evidence suggests that in spite of articulated commitments to
equity, school districts and professional preparation and regulatory bodies support these socialization practices implicitly and are also complicit in perpetuating and reinforcing management systems that are antithetical to democratic or socially just practices. (p. 709)

Armstrong (2010) further summarized the issue of APs’ workload by stating that new APs were not provided access to strong induction programs, had unclear and ever-changing job descriptions, and faced continuous, new demands and expectations from school district personnel, all contributing to what Armstrong described as “a Sisyphean workload” (p. 704).

To combat the potentially negative personal and psychological impact of the position, APs need to manage their time and prioritize their tasks. However, research indicates that time and task management is something with which many novice APs struggle. In their study of novice and experienced APs, Barnett et al., (2012) found that new and experienced APs perceived the job to be “fast paced and overwhelming, resulting in frustration in not being able to manage their time and complete tasks efficiently and effectively” (p. 116). When considering that experienced APs struggle with effective task management, one must consider how much more daunting task management is for novice APs who are still learning *how* to complete many of the tasks as well.

The job of the AP does not exist in isolation, and the school context they enter can have a dramatic effect on an APs level of emotional exhaustion. In a case study about a
first-year AP, Karpinski (2008) vividly portrayed the frustration that novice APs often encounter in the following excerpt:

A novice assistant principal, eager to lead, begins her career as an administrator in a school beset with problems and far removed from the textbook definitions of learning community. She works with inexperienced teachers, disillusioned veteran teachers, and a principal who is distracted and overwhelmed by personal concerns. Her suggestions are disregarded, her requests halfheartedly filled, and her mandates ignored. Drowning in paperwork, meetings, and administrivia, she wonders how and whether she can lead. (p. 92)

In a study of eight newly appointed APs, participants shed light on similar experiences with emotional exhaustion. One participant explained that the job is emotionally exhausting because of the situations that the students bring with them to school, which are hard to cope with (Armstrong, 2010).

**Unanswered Calls for Support**

APs need support to meet the demands of their job (Burdette & Schertzer, 2005; Fusarelli et al., 2018; Wilson & Xue, 2013). Arguably, novice APs are even more in need of support than experienced APs (Barnett, et al., 2012; Peterson et al., 1987). Historically, professional development opportunities have not been designed to meet the needs of APs (Marshall et al., 1990). However, not much has changed as it relates to the support of APs. Although it has been recommended for decades that current and aspiring APs need clearly defined professional development to foster continual growth and purposeful leadership (Jayne, 1996), it is a call that is just now beginning to be answered, and not
consistently. Many current programs are designed for APs who are preparing for the principal position (Durden et al., 2008; Gurley et al., 2015), but few studies focus on available support programs for novice APs. Kottkamp and Rusch (2009) compare research on leadership preparation and support to “a lot of islands sprinkled across a vast sea” (p. 80).

Despite the specific needs of novice APs, the few programs that exist in the literature appear to include APs as an afterthought in induction programs that were originally designed for principals. There is evidence of this in a survey of support that was part of The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative. Participating APs ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with ten aspects of support they received. They expressed receiving 12% less support, on average, than the principals surveyed on the same aspects of support. APs also ranked the support they received less than the principals in all ten categories. Those categories had questions about the knowledge of those providing support to APs, relevance of support provided to AP needs, positive, measurable results of support provided to APs, and the extent to which AP feedback was used to adapt the continuing support (Turnbull et al., 2013).

Execution of induction programs is another downfall. There are few voices from novice APs on induction experience (Craft et al., 2016), but a quote provided by the New Teacher Center aptly summarizes a novice principals’ view of the state of administrator induction. The novice principal stated the following:

I sometimes wondered if I would survive my first year as a principal. I felt terribly isolated on the job and got almost no real support from my supervisor, who was
just as busy and stressed as I was. Unfortunately, my credential program added to the stress by layering on classroom sessions and requirements that did not really contribute a whole lot to my main focus, which was being the best at my school. (Bloom et al., 2005, p. 30).

A professional development program in Hawaii demonstrates the desire to support novice APs but follows the same monthly meeting framework that takes the administrator away from the worksite. That study also included ‘assignments’ for the APs to complete at their schools. Few participants completed those assignments, instead prioritizing job-related tasks (Enomoto, 2012).

Even more concerning than the largely unanswered calls for support in the literature are the stories of those too encumbered in the political pressures of school administration to feel they can ask for support. In a study entitled, ‘Oh, Is That My Job?’ Role Vulnerability in the Vice-Principalship, Mitchell et al., (2017) explained how difficult it is to find collegial support. Through individual interviews and focus-groups with 25 APs, they found myriad examples of this struggle. One participant explained how she was only able to express her need for support because of a personal connection with someone higher in the hierarchy. The participant shared that she “was very lucky, in that our current director knows my mom well … I was comfortable enough to sit down and ask his advice before I had to meet with my superintendent” (p. 11). Uncertainty about the lines of authority and alliances can leave APs feeling unsupported. One participant expressed the following concern related to support, “I’m even concerned if I’m talking to a mentor. Everybody here is so connected” (p. 11). In a summary of their findings,
Mitchell et al. (2017) noted that when there are clear lines of support, APs are better prepared to address the predicaments that exist in the context of political tensions in their school and district.

In summary, the research presently available has described the roles and responsibilities of APs. The hardships of APs are also well-documented, as is their need for support in a variety of forms. The literature has recently become more targeted, delving deeper into the formal and informal support needs of APs, both novice and experienced. What is not yet clear in current research is how novice APs experience support as they transition into their new administrative role.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

The chapter presents the purpose of the study, the research questions, the phenomenological framework, and the researcher’s autobiography and assumptions. Next sampling methods, participant demographics, data collection methods, and data analysis methods are discussed. The chapter concludes with a description of data management and integrity measures.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how novice APs experience support as they transition into their new administrative role. The aim of the study was to understand which forms of formal and informal support APs most rely upon during their transition.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study was How do novice assistant principals experience support as they transition into their new administrative role? Secondary questions were:

1. What are the most salient transition issues faced by novice assistant principals?
2. To what extent do formal programs support the transition of novice assistant principals?
3. How do novice assistant principals experience informal support?
4. How do novice assistant principals experience support on a day-to-day basis?
Phenomenological Framework

A phenomenological framework is used when the focus of the research is to gain an understanding of what people experience and how they experience it (Patton, 2015). In phenomenology, researchers seek to uncover features of the experience that are common to members of a specific group (Patton, 2015). Phenomenological studies begin with a central question about the meaning of how participants experience the phenomena of interest (van Manen, 2016). In this study, the central question focuses on a specific group of people as they experience a meaningful job transition. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stress the importance of research that is focused on understanding experiences from the perspectives of the participants. Adams and van Manen (2008) expressed the view that phenomenology is valuable due to its prioritization and investigation of human experiences.

The rationale for choosing phenomenology as the research design for this study lies in the interconnectivity between Human Resource Development (HRD) and phenomenology. An interest of HRD is to improve upon the human experience within an organization and the focus of phenomenologists is the human experience (Gibson & Hanes, 2003).

Researcher’s Autobiography and Assumptions

Prior to conducting interviews, it is common practice in phenomenology for the researcher to discover potential assumptions and biases about the phenomenon being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moustakas (1995) recommended that the researcher engage in a process called epoché, wherein the researcher examines his or her
experiences and becomes aware of personal viewpoints, prejudices, and assumptions. Those assumptions and prejudices are then set aside temporarily, to the greatest extent possible, and the phenomena of interest is explored. This study’s époque consists of the researcher’s autobiography and is followed by corresponding assumptions.

**Autobiography**

When I realized that I no longer felt the joy of teaching that I once experienced, I began seeking different growth opportunities within the public school system. At that point, I had a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education for kindergarten through sixth grade and a master’s degree in Reading Education for kindergarten through twelfth grade. I also held a teaching certification in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and teaching certificate endorsements for Gifted Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Yet, the classroom lost the allure that it once held for me. I had taught nearly every grade level in my school and I held certification in multiple areas, but I felt very undervalued as a teacher in the eyes of the public and policy makers. I will always remember the morning that I was in my classroom preparing for the arrival of my students and listening to the local news on the radio. I recall a prominent public figure discussing public education and the teaching profession. When the reporter asked the public figure if he would like for his daughter to enter the teaching profession, he responded that his ambitions for his daughter were higher than that. That was the day I began to explore other career options.

After some investigation, I discovered that I had few options if I wanted to exit the classroom but remain working for the public school system. I learned that I could
apply for a secretarial position, but I would earn less than half of my current salary. Or, I could pursue the leadership track. That would enable me to leave the classroom and potentially earn a higher salary. When my only child was three months old and I was on a maternity leave from work, I enrolled in an Educational Leadership program at my local University and began working towards my certification in Educational Leadership and a corresponding specialist’s degree. My coursework primarily focused on the role of the assistant principal since that is typically the entry position for school-site school leadership. The more I learned about the assistant principal role, the more the complexity of the job caught my interest. I was not certain if I was scared to consider a position that had the potential to be more demanding than a teaching position or if I was excited for the thrill of a new challenge.

By the end of my first semester of coursework towards my Educational Leadership certificate and degree, it became clear to me that the longer I was on maternity leave, the farther removed from the school I was becoming. I was engaged in classes aimed at learning everything I could about being a school administrator, but I was rapidly losing touch with the day-to-day operations of the school. During my next semester I remained on maternity leave. However, I contacted the principal of the school where I was a teacher for seven years and asked if I could do an informal job shadow with her assistant principal who was also a good friend of mine. They both welcomed me into the office, and I spent two full days every week working alongside that assistant principal. From her I learned what constituted the daily tasks of an assistant principal, as well as how to complete key job functions such as maintaining the legally required
documentation for students in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. That informal job shadow lasted for about nine months, until the end of the school year.

An internship was required as part of the Educational Leadership certification. Typically, the University student approaches his/her school principal and asks for the opportunity to spend time with one of the administrators and requests to engage in different leadership opportunities. The amount of time the student spends with the administrator(s) is usually dictated by the student’s work schedule. A University student that teaches classes all day would have to arrive early or stay late to learn from and work with an administrator. A student that has a position that is either partially released or fully released would have more time to engage with the administrator(s). At that time, I had exhausted the time provided by the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and requested to take a one-year personal leave. That allowed me to continue my employment with the school district, but I was no longer assigned to a specific school. Since I was not assigned to a school, I had the opportunity to approach any school I desired for the internship. I discussed my situation with the professor teaching the internship class and she suggested a specific school that she thought would be a good fit for me. A previous student of hers was currently the assistant principal. The school was a very high-performing school, known for having excellent administrators. Additionally, my professor knew that the assistant principal had connections with the school district offices that could lead to potential future learning and growth opportunities for me.
I took the advice of my professor and turned the semester-long internship into a year-long job shadow. I spent two full days every week working directly with the assistant principal. During that time, she taught me many of the practical skills I would need as an administrator, such as requirements and procedures for managing the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program, and how to use the various district-provided computer applications that she engaged with on a daily basis. She also made it a point to share her specific strategies related to various aspects of leadership in general, such as how she manages her daily tasks, how to be a buffer between legally required policies and procedures and the teachers, how to support the overarching goals of the school and the school principal, and how to settle disputes involving students, teachers, and/or parents.

That assistant principal also put me in touch with someone she knew who worked in one of the school district offices. I met with that director and she afforded me the opportunity to do an informal job shadow with her for one day every week during that same year. Working with the assistant principals, I was able to see the ‘big picture’ that I wasn’t privy to as a classroom teacher. However, working with the director in the district office, I was able to see an even ‘bigger picture’ that I didn’t know existed. The more access I had to all the pieces of the school administration puzzle, the more I wanted to learn. It was at that time that I realized not all school-site administrators were privy to that larger school-district picture that I was beginning to paint for myself.

During that year, I completed my University coursework, passed the Florida Educator Leadership Exam (FELE), and obtained my Leadership Certificate. At that
point, I had been on leave from work for two and a half years, and it was time for me to return to work. I loved the fast-pace and challenge I observed while engaging in my job shadow experience at the school district, and when an opportunity to work there as a Curriculum Support Specialist (CSS) presented itself, I was thrilled to apply. I was selected for the position and had the chance to work with many different offices in that capacity, with most of my work related to professional development and human capital management. My main responsibility was to oversee the new teacher induction program for one of the regions within the school district, which encompassed approximately 100 schools. However, working in the professional development office entailed that I had many additional responsibilities falling under the human capital umbrella. It is during that time that I formed many of my current viewpoints related to professional development, novices entering a new job, and personal and professional growth.

Due to a two-hour daily commute, each way, I decided to leave that position after one year. After one year as a kindergarten teacher the following year, I had the chance to become the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher at the school where I did my second job shadowing. I worked with small groups of students learning the English language and was tasked with supervising the ESOL program and related documentation at the school. I have been in that role for two years and that is my current position.

The flexibility of my position allows me to continue working closely with the school administration. I spend many hours with one of the two assistant principals to continue refining my leadership skills. Although she is still considered a novice AP in her
third year, she has brought much experience to her position and she shares it with me daily. From her I have learned how to focus on the many different necessary aspects related to instructional leadership including data analysis, intervention for students, and providing teachers the support needed to be the most effective educators possible. I have also learned the finer points of how to utilize Microsoft Excel to complete administrative tasks. In a school district with such a high student population, there are large amounts of data, and Excel can be used to focus on the smaller components within the larger context. She has also helped me to become proficient with using the calendar feature on Microsoft Outlook to manage our numerous daily tasks.

In addition to the role of the ESOL coordinator, I hold other leadership positions. I have learned about the importance of parent involvement, input, and relationships as the Educational Excellence School Advisory Committee (EESAC) Chairperson. As the School Improvement Plan (SIP) coordinator, I work with our leadership team and administrative team to develop a plan yearly to reach our school-wide goals. During standardized test administrations, I work with our assistant principals to oversee the test administration and I have learned best practices for testing coordinators. It is a culmination of my current positions and my previous leadership experiences, both as a teacher and a curriculum support specialist, that have led to my current assumptions regarding novice APs and the support they receive as they enter the realm of school administration. The following section lists those assumptions.
Assumptions

After serious personal reflection, I have come to realize that I hold the following assumptions related to the experiences of assistant principals and the support they receive as novices in their field.

1. The time required from assistant principals to fulfill their responsibilities has a negative impact on family members.

2. Many aspects of being an effective leader, one who contributes to the accomplishment of the organizations’ overarching goals, can be learned. However, there are innate leadership qualities that I believe are not teachable.

3. To be a highly effective novice assistant principal, you must have sought growth and learning opportunities related to the position prior to being hired.

Sampling Methods

For the purpose of this study, novice assistant principals were selected from a large, urban school district in Florida. At the time of the study, approximately 5,423 assistant principals worked in Florida’s public schools (Florida Department of Education, 2021). The school district in which this research was conducted is one of the five largest school districts in the United States and has a diverse student population. The APs in this school district comprise 12.9% of the total number of APs in Florida, which is the largest number of APs in any of the 74 Florida school districts. Patton (2015) noted the importance of sample selection in qualitative inquiry, stressing the alignment of research participants and research questions. The large size of this urban school district and the
diverse student body it serves make it an ideal population to study when asking questions about support needs of novice school administrators.

Criterion sampling and snowball sampling were used to identify and select 10 novice APs to participate in this study. Criterion sampling refers to a type of purposeful sampling strategy wherein all participants possess specific, predetermined characteristics (Patton, 2015). All participants in this study met the following criteria: (a) currently employed as an assistant principal, (b) work in the same school district, and (c) have been an assistant principal for three years or less at the time of the interview.

Snowball sampling identifies potential participants by asking people if they know anyone who could respond to questions related to the focus of the inquiry (Patton, 2015). The first four participants in the study were recruited by the researcher and the six remaining participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was accomplished by asking interviewees for suggestions about people who may be interested in participating as well as using social media to ask well-informed people who could be contacted for participation.

To obtain a list of all potential participants in the school district, the researcher created a database of all APs that were hired in the last three years, from 2017 to 2020. All newly hired APs in the school district are announced publicly upon hire, monthly, in a School Board Agenda item. This information is available to the public and posted on the school districts’ School Board website. An initial email was sent to all eligible participants, introducing the researcher and the study, and asking for interest in participation. According to the requirements of the school district in which the research
was being conducted, the principal of each school was also included in the initial email to make him/her aware of the study and potential participation by their AP. Once a response was received from an interested participant who met the criteria, a second email was sent asking the participant to provide dates and times they were available for an interview. After the participants indicated their availability, a follow-up email was sent to confirm a date and time for an interview. Attached to that email were the following: a link to an online survey with an embedded consent form and general background and demographic questions, a research summary, and a list of the research questions. A final reminder email was sent to all participants the night before their scheduled interview. All emails and interviews took place during a two-month period. It should be noted that this dissertation will be published during an extraordinary time in history as the world, and schools, contend with the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, all interviews were held before schools were close due to health concerns.

**Participant Demographics**

All participants were from the same large, urban school district in the Southeast United States and had three years or less of experience as school-site administrators at the time of the interviews. All participants worked in the same school district in Florida. The participants’ demographic information includes the following: (a) gender, age (range), ethnic identity, and school level (b) school level, size of school, and number of APs working at their school, and (c) previous position before becoming an AP.

Of the 10 APs participating in the study, half of the 10 participants were male, and half of the participants were female. As indicated on the online survey, four
participants were in the 31-40 age range, four participants were in the 41-50 age range, and two participants were in the 51-60 age range. Related to ethnic identity, three participants indicated that they were ‘African American’, five participants indicated that they were ‘Hispanic’, and two participants indicated that they were ‘White’. Regarding the school level where they worked as an AP, three participants worked at an elementary school, three participants worked at a K-8 Center (kindergarten through eighth grade), one participant worked at a middle school, and three participants worked at a high school.

The participants’ ethnic identity, gender, age range, and school level are summarized in Table 1. The information contained in Table 1 below is listed in chronological order, according to the date of each participants’ interview.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>School Level</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>K-8 Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>K-8 Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrah</td>
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<td>31-40</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Race/Culture</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
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<td>------------</td>
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</tr>
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<td>K-8 Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant Work Context**

The participants worked in four different levels of schools: elementary school, middle school, K-8 center, and high school. In this school district, the number of APs assigned to a school is calculated in relationship to the number of students attending the school. Generally, a higher student population generates more AP positions. There are exceptions. For example, a school with a high population of students with disabilities or a school with a special magnet program may be granted another AP position. Hector was the only participant that worked at a school that did not follow the regular student to AP ratio. Table 2 below indicates the school level and the size of the school. For the purposes of this study, small school size refers to a school with a population of less than 500 students, medium school size refers to a school with a population of 501 - 1,000 students, and a large school is one with greater than 1,000 students.
Table 2  
*Administration Context of Novice APs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Farrah</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Large</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>K-8 Center</td>
<td>Large</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
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<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>K-8 Center</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>K-8 Center</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
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<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hector</td>
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<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Previous Positions**

Of the 10 participants, all participants previously held teaching positions. One participant was a teacher immediately before obtaining the position of AP. Five of the participants were academic coaches for specific subject areas immediately before their
AP role. Academic coaches in this district do not have classroom duties assigned to them and focus specifically on helping teachers enhance their instruction in a specific subject area. They are assigned to schools or groups of schools that have many students who are not demonstrating academic proficiency on standardized state assessments. Two of the participants were lead teachers who did not have classroom responsibilities and supported the improvement of instruction across the school. Of the two remaining participants, one was a teacher trainer that worked for a regional office and one was a curriculum support specialist that worked for a district office. Persons in regional office positions have a narrow focus and support specific schools, according to location, in their academic goals. Persons working in district office positions support district-wide initiatives and interests, such as professional development or special education. Table 3 below lists the position participants held immediately before being hired as an AP.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrah</td>
<td>Academic Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>Lead Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

60
Data Collection

Data for this phenomenological study was collected through semi-structured interviews. When determining which type of interview to use, the researcher considered the amount of structure needed to elicit detailed responses from the participants. Semi-structured interviews usually have the aim of obtaining specific information from all participants but allow the researcher the flexibility to change the order and wording of the research questions and to respond to new ideas and situations presented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The semi-structured interview was chosen for this study because of its’ combination of flexibility and focus, which would allow for a complete exploration of the phenomenon.

Interview Guide Construction

A semi-structured interview guide can be utilized in qualitative research to ensure that each person interviewed is afforded the opportunity to respond to all relevant topics.
of exploration, yet it provides the interviewer the freedom to probe into different areas throughout the course of the interview (Patton, 2015). The interview guide for this study was constructed around the background literature and the four components of Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory: situation, self, strategies, support. To provide more structure and flow to the interview, the guide was organized chronologically, beginning with questions about positions held before becoming an AP and concluding with reflective questions related to the experience thus far. However, the researcher maintained the flexibility to change the order and phrasing of the questions, as well as to seek elaboration on experiences shared by participants. See Table 4 below for the derivation of the guiding questions and see Appendix A for the complete interview guide.

Table 4

*Derivation of Interview Guide Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Derivation</th>
<th>Interview Guide Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>Describe your experience as an assistant principal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe a typical day as an assistant principal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are some of the biggest challenges experienced daily?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you do when you encounter that challenge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me about your work-life balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Theory:</td>
<td>What advice would you give to someone starting out as an AP?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>What do you want people you work with to know about being an AP?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Theory:</td>
<td>Describe the positions you held before you became an AP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>What factors influenced your decision to become an AP?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How does your current role compare to your previous role?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Theory:</td>
<td>What do you do when you encounter a challenge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Describe any strategies you use to manage the workload.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you do when you feel emotionally exhausted at work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Theory:</td>
<td>What would you say has helped you most since you became an AP?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Describe any programs you participate in, or have participated in, and how they helped you as an AP.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Administration

Before each interview, the researcher ensured that the participant signed the consent form that was sent via email as a Survey Monkey link (see Appendix B). The consent information was sent prior to the interview to ensure each participant had time to read the document and ask questions as needed. In addition to providing their consent, that document provided the purpose of the study, associated risks and benefits of participation, and guaranteed the confidentiality of all participants. The Survey Monkey link also contained background questions and demographic questions. One interview was conducted with each participant. The interviews ranged from 34 minutes to 53 minutes and the interviews lasted an average of 42 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded. The researcher transcribed each audio recording, verbatim, to provide the most robust data for analysis and gain familiarity with the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To capture initial observations and thoughts during interview transcription, notes were recorded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The semi-structured interviews took place using the online videoconferencing platform called Zoom. The use of online videoconferencing for interviews is becoming increasingly accepted as a reliable method of qualitative research (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020; Jenner & Myers, 2019). O’Connor and Madge (2017) contend that as an alternative to face-to-face interviews, interviews that use videoconferencing can resemble the ‘honesty’ of conventional face-to-face interviews. Researchers have found that data obtained from participants being interviewed using videoconferencing did not differ in quality from face-to-face interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013) and in some
cases participants were more expressive than their face-to-face counterparts (Mabragana et al., 2013). Participants in a study by Gray et al. (2020) appreciated the following aspects of participating in a videoconference via the Zoom platform: convenience and ability to choose a preferred location, accessibility (i.e., computer, phone, tablet), and the time saved by not having to travel to a different location.

The choice to conduct interviews via videoconferences for this study was to accommodate the busy schedules of the participants. The literature made it clear that APs, particularly novice APs, have demanding schedules that make it challenging to accomplish all their tasks in any given day. Videoconferencing is a convenient way for participants to fit the interview into their work schedules and daily life (Gray et al., 2020; Irani, 2019). The use of videoconferencing also allowed the interview to take place at the participants’ work location, after-hours, without compromising their right to privacy. The researcher would not be physically appearing at their work location, and participants were in control of who had access to the conversation. This was especially important since the content of the interview was focused on their work experience.

The practice of allowing participants to choose the environment for their interview has the potential to increase reliability due to their enhanced feeling of ease (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the combination of allowing participants to choose their interview location and the use of videoconferencing did present the researcher with a challenge. Four of the ten participants chose a location where they did not have access to a camera for the interview. Therefore, the researcher was unable to observe the visual cues of participants, such as body language and facial expressions, as recommended by
The researcher considered the possibility that the participants who did not choose a location with a camera may have made that choice because of privacy concerns or personal comfort level. Therefore, while it was not an ideal situation, the researcher did not request that the participant change their interview location and time to include a camera.

As indicated by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the iterative process of data analysis begins with the first interview, which generates the first insights and directs the next phase of data collection. While conducting these interviews with and without participant cameras, the researcher noticed patterns of similarity between the responses of participants with cameras and the participants without cameras. To confirm, the researcher reviewed the themes according to the two groups of participants: those who participated in two-way visual interviews, where the interviewer and the intervieweewee could both see each other and those who participated in one-way visual interviews, where the interviewee could see the interviewer, but the interviewer could not see the interviewee. The findings were represented from both groups except for one theme. The theme of “love their job” was only expressed by participants with their camera off and therefore was not included in the findings.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis used for this study was inductive analysis. Inductive analysis begins with specific, open-ended observations of the data that build towards an understanding of patterns and categories that may emerge from the data (Patton, 2015). To begin, the researcher formatted all transcripts in the same manner. The interview
questions were removed and replaced with a phrase indicating the underlying concept for each interview question. There were fourteen interview questions, and the following fourteen phrases were used: previous positions, AP experiences thus far, decision influences, typical day, daily challenges, cope with challenges, most helpful, helpful program, workload strategies, emotionally exhausted, work-life balance, current role compared to previous role, advice to new APs, and what co-workers to know about being an AP. This was done to give the researcher a frame of reference when reading the transcripts and to remove all speech by the researcher from the coding process. The formatted transcripts were added as ‘documents’ into the data management program, atlas.ti. Transcripts were titled according to the pseudonym for each interview participant. For example, the transcript for the first participant was titled with his pseudonym, “Alex”. This naming system aided the connection of quotes to participants in the data analysis process.

While there is no one correct way to conduct qualitative data analysis, it can be helpful for a new researcher to use a structured approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This novice researcher followed the step-by-step process of analysis proposed by Merriam & Tisdell (2016). This process includes category construction, sorting categories and data, naming the categories.

**Category Construction**

This step entailed reading the first interview transcript and making notations in the form of open codes. The computer program, atlas.ti, was used for this step. During this phase of open coding the researcher attached a code to any word, phrase, sentence, or
section that was interesting, potentially relevant, or important to the study. The first transcript was reviewed in this manner. Once the researcher worked through the entire transcript, the codes were reviewed and grouped according to commonalities. All subsequent transcripts were approached in this way and a list of codes was developed. During this phase of open coding the researcher also returned to the assumptions presented earlier in Chapter 3 to bring them to the forefront and guard against potential biases during open coding. Specifically, the researcher made herself aware of ideas that could be influenced by the assumptions identified.

**Sorting Categories and Data**

The preliminary list of groupings, or categories, was revisited. Some were renamed to be more illustrative of the theme they represented. Others that were deemed to represent the same idea were merged. For example, the codes of ‘APs have a hand in everything’ and ‘a lot of responsibility’ were merged into a more representative category of ‘pressures of being a leader’. The following codes were removed during this phase: “best part”, “no time to eat”, “safety”, “students as source of stress relief”, and “friendship”. Once the preliminary categories derived from the transcripts were reviewed, the researcher returned to each transcript to search for more units of related information and attached codes accordingly. This was done to make the resulting data analysis more robust. The linking of codes and the units representing the code was facilitated by using atlas.ti, which preserved the original identifying information for each code including the respondents’ pseudonym.
As part of this step, the researcher created a report in atlas.ti. for each of the remaining categories. Each report contained all units associated with the category and the participant they were attached to. Each report was reviewed, and patterns within each category were noted. Discrepant cases were also noted.

**Naming the Categories**

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) contend that the names of categories can come from the participants’ exact words, the researcher, and sources outside the study such as a literature reviewed or a theoretical framework. They also note that categories should be responsive to the research question, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitizing, and conceptually congruent.

Responsive categories should allow for answers to the research question. All research questions in this study can be answered using the identified categories. Exhaustive categories means that all data that were determined to be relevant or important should fit within a category (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All relevant data in this study was included in a category. Mutual exclusivity means that a unit of data only fits into one category, indicating appropriate refinement of the categories. No units of data in this study were included in more than one category. Sensitizing categories have names that allow for an outside reader to understand the name of the category and have an idea about the nature of the information contained within. Conceptually congruent categories make sense together and fit well together (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The categories created during data analysis are logical and make sense together.
The five themes emerged from the inductive analysis were: (a) deliberate preparation, (b) challenges (c) coping strategies, (d) support mechanisms, and (e) personal attributes. During the process of naming the categories, it became clear that a focus on the study’s purpose was maintained during data analysis and that the categories resulting from data analysis were responsive to the purpose of the research.

**Data Management**

Online interview conversations were recorded via the Zoom platform. The audio recordings were stored on the researcher’s hard drive, as well as via a cloud service. The hard drive and the cloud storage service are both password-protected, and only the researcher is privy to the password. The transcripts were stored on an external hard drive and in a cloud storage service. Pseudonyms were assigned to each research participant prior to data analysis and were used in all transcripts. The identification key was saved on the same password-protected platforms as the transcripts.

**Integrity Measures**

The quality of qualitative research is addressed by assessing its’ “trustworthiness” (Patton, 2015, p. 684). Trustworthiness is generally evaluated using the following four criteria: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Credibility refers to, “the methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants’ expressions and the researcher’s interpretations of them” (Given, 2008, p. 138). Credibility in this study was enhanced using member checks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Member checks involve the use of participants to ensure that data analysis is accurate and
consistent with the participants’ perceptions and beliefs (Given, 2008). All participants were contacted to determine if the researcher appropriately interpreted their experiences and captured their perspectives accurately. Three participants, Catherine, David, and Gwen responded that the portrayal of their experiences was accurate. Credibility was also improved by asking a colleague who is knowledgeable in the field of school administration, including the area of novice APs, to review and critique the data analysis findings. The colleague suggested that the theme of preparation be explored more deeply and believed that it was highly relevant to the support the APs later received from one another through social networks. Transferability suggests that, “the results of the research can be transferred to other contexts and situations beyond the scope of the study context” (Given, 2008, p. 138). Transferability was enhanced by providing a complete description of the participants, the context, the research design, and the inclusion of verbatim descriptions of participants’ experiences. This will allow for readers to be able to determine if the findings are transferable to their environment (Given, 2008, p. 138).

Ensuring that the results of a study are consistent with the data that was collected is referred to as “dependability” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 250). Dependability requires that the researcher provide sufficient methodological information so that the study can be replicated by others (Given, 2008, p. 138). Dependability was enhanced by working closely with members of the dissertation committee, the dissertation chairperson, and feedback provided from the graduate program director. Suggestions were provided and revisions were made to ensure that appropriate background to the study was
provided, methods were presented clearly and accurately, data was reviewed using an iterative process, and findings were indicated of participants’ shared experiences.

Confirmability can be described as, “the degree to which the results of the study are based on the research purpose and not altered due to researcher bias” (Given, 2008, p. 138). To increase confirmability, this researcher used the process of epoché by becoming aware of personal biases to gain clarity about assumptions preconceptions. Those assumptions were revisited during the data analysis process to lessen the possibility of the researcher unintentionally projecting personal beliefs into the findings. The researcher also described the data collection and data analysis processes clearly to make the research method as transparent as possible (Given, 2008, p. 138).
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This phenomenological study examined how novice APs experienced support as they transitioned into their new administrative roles. Seeking to understand the salient transition issues faced by novice APs, as well as their experiences of formal and informal support, were the foci of this study. The findings in this chapter emerged from the analysis of participants’ interviews. Findings are organized according to the following themes: (a) deliberate preparation, (b) challenges (c) coping strategies, (d) support mechanisms, and (e) personal attributes.

Deliberate Preparation

Gaining experience working outside of the classroom allows future APs the opportunity to engage in leadership activities and can lead to feelings of readiness to assume the new administrative role (Searby et al., 2017). Aspiring administrators frequently assume informal supervisory roles and attend to leadership tasks (Armstrong, 2012). The participants in this study all engaged in self-driven preparation for their potential new role and a theme that emerged from the interviews was that of deliberate preparation. Specifically, participants sought leadership roles and leadership experience prior to becoming an AP. Throughout the interviews, participants provided experiential anecdotes related to two main types of preparation: preparation via teacher leadership responsibilities and role in the school setting and preparation via teacher leadership roles in regional and district offices. While some participants held leadership positions within their school, other participants held leadership positions outside their school in regional
or district offices, a few had experienced leadership positions both within and outside the school setting. The following section provides the participants’ thoughts and experiences regarding the following aspects of deliberate preparation: (a) importance of preparation, (b) preparation via teacher leadership responsibilities within their school site, and (c) preparation via jobs held in regional or district offices.

**Importance of Preparation**

Regarding the importance of intentional leadership preparation for the administrative role, many participants expressed views related to the importance of intentionally gaining leadership experience and broadening their view of the educational and administrative context. Alex had the view that it is crucial for an administrator to have the opportunity to visit multiple schools, observe different styles of leadership, and to be aware of how different individual schools can be from one another. Alex explained his belief that, “you can’t appreciate what one [school] has, and what the other has, unless you visit both and see the struggles of both.” He continued by comparing his observations of a school in an affluent community to his observations of a school in an underserved community. Alex noted that if you only experience one school setting, it “puts blinders on you” and “you can’t see outside of it”. He explained how well-prepared he has felt for this role and credits much of that feeling to his preparation and previous roles before accepting the administrative position.

While Alex underscored the importance of experiencing and visiting multiple schools in preparation for the AP role, Eric shared a view that it is necessary to prepare for the role by ensuring a complete understanding of the daily operations of a school. He
stated that he believes a prospective AP should have “been in a classroom at least ten to twelve [years] so you can understand the aspects of being in the classroom, understand curriculum, and understand school operations. You don’t learn this stuff overnight. It takes time.” However, during his tenure as a teacher, Eric held several simultaneous leadership roles in conjunction with his teaching position.

Catherine and Farrah both described a process of deliberate preparation and underscored their desire to feel ready for the AP position. Catherine said that when she made the decision to earn her master’s degree in Educational Leadership, she realized that she had much to learn about beginning a career in school administration. She shared a scenario in which she had earned her degree, and her certification in Educational Leadership, but did not immediately apply for AP positions. Rather, she sought to first prepare herself by gaining more experience. Catherine said that she “took her time” and wanted to feel, “ready to take on the position”. Farrah relayed her experiences of intentional preparation and stated that, “I think I have been preparing all along. It wasn’t something where I was just like, ‘I want to be an AP’. I had been grooming myself for leadership for a while.” Betty described her situation in which there wasn’t an AP at her small high school when she was pursuing her Educational Leadership degree. She took advantage of the opportunity to fill in that gap and act as a pseudo-administrator at her school. She explained that she was, “always trying to expand my experiences, my skills, and really take advantage of the opportunity I have been given.” She also noted that, “it’s very difficult to become an assistant principal” and explained how her preparation made her feel ready for the role once the opportunity presented itself.
Preparation via Teacher Leadership Responsibilities in the School Setting

While many definitions exist, the contemporary notion of teacher leadership refers to leadership actions undertaken both within and outside the classroom that are aimed at positively influencing school-wide instruction and student achievement (Nguyen et al., 2019). A majority of the ten participants reported engaging in teacher leadership roles prior to becoming an AP, with many participants assuming multiple roles. Some of the participants enacted the teacher leadership role from within the classroom, while teaching students for a full day. Other participants had teacher leadership positions that allowed them to only teach for part of the day and focus on leadership for the remainder of the day. The remainder of the participants held fully released teacher leadership positions that allowed them to focus solely on leadership activities with no classroom teaching responsibilities assigned to them.

During the interview, Betty described the steps she took once she finished her specialist degree in Educational Leadership eight years ago. She first pursued and obtained the role of academic coach at the middle school where she worked. That role was a fully released position. She worked closely with the assistant principal at her school to analyze student achievement data, supervise intervention programs for struggling students, and support teachers with implementing best practices for instruction. That assistant principal was promoted to a principal position at a high school and recruited Betty to change schools and serve as the lead teacher at that school. Her position as lead teacher at the high school held similar leadership responsibilities as the academic coach position at the middle school, but she worked with all subject areas.
Additionally, she was the test chairperson for the school. That role gave her the responsibility of maintaining all state-mandated testing materials, creating a test administration plan for each assessment, and ensuring that all students take the assessment in compliance with testing requirements from the State Department of Education. She also served as the activities director for the high school. That role required her to plan many aspects related to school functions including activities related to incoming freshmen and outgoing seniors, student government operations, coordination with outside organizations, and management of the school-wide activities calendar. When reflecting on the leadership roles she embarked on and how they relate to her current AP position, Betty remarked:

The position I had before as a lead teacher, I conducted a lot of the roles and responsibilities of an assistant principal. So, I really thought that when I just changed my position, the title, that it would just be a super smooth easy transition, and for the most part it has been. But you do get added on another realm of responsibilities that I didn’t have before.

Of her deliberate leadership preparation, Catherine said that, “I started to get to do more leadership things, and get more involved, and learn more. It wasn’t from one day to the next . . . when I say it was a very slow process, it was.” While participating in coursework for her master’s degree in Educational Leadership, Catherine said she realized that she had “lots to learn”, which is what led her to pursue the academic coach position at her school. Reflecting on the responsibilities associated with that leadership position, Catherine said that she was “making a good amount to almost all of the
curriculum decisions in terms of my department”. She observed that due to her experience as an academic coach, as an AP she feels that her strength is making curriculum decisions for the school. She also listed the following regarding other leadership responsibilities she held prior to becoming an AP:

I ran Saturday school, I ran an after-school program top to bottom, I dealt with custodial, I dealt with security, I dealt with cafeteria . . . so I got a little bit of experience here and there from a lot of the different parts of the building by doing all of these things.

Of the nine participants who engaged in deliberate leadership preparation at their school-site, David held the most leadership roles. Initially, his leadership roles were all performed in conjunction with teaching his fifth-grade students full-time. During that time, he engaged in preparatory leadership responsibilities. He was the grade-level chairperson for fifth grade, tasked with organizing fifth grade activities and leading grade-level meetings with all fifth-grade teachers. He was also the EESAC chairperson. That position entailed sharing school-related information, such as updates regarding student academic achievement, with a representative group of parents, student leaders, other teachers, and business representatives from the neighboring community. He also supervised clubs and academic intervention programs that took place outside normal school hours, such as afterschool and on Saturdays. Within those leadership roles he was accountable for ensuring student safety, communicating with parents regarding student progress, and recruiting students to participate in the programs. Approximately six years ago, David became the academic coach at the same school. He held that fully released
position for four years before being promoted to the AP position. David noted the following regarding the myriad of leadership positions he held:

The four years that I was the academic coach was really the most impactful and meaningful experience . . . there was a wide spectrum of things I learned in that four years I was an [academic] coach and it really gave me the tools I needed to be successful in this position.

Eric also engaged in deliberate preparation for the AP role. However, he was the only participant who never held a position that released him from his classroom responsibilities. All his leadership responsibilities were carried out in conjunction with his full-time teaching duties. He taught many different grade levels and subject areas to enhance his curriculum knowledge. He taught fourth and fifth grade students in an Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program reading, language arts, and math, which added to his knowledge of meeting the academic needs of students who face learning challenges. In the following years, he taught second grade, a first and second grade combination class, third grade, fourth grade, and served as a grade-level chairperson. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, Eric was the coordinator for his school’s wellness program and worked with other teachers, cafeteria staff, and the community to support students’ health and nutrition. He was also a member of the EESAC and the union steward for his school. As the union steward, Eric was responsible for familiarizing himself with the teacher’s contract and helping to settle contract-related disputes and possible breaches of contract.
Farrah also prepared deliberately for the AP position. She said, “I think I have been preparing all along. It wasn’t something where I was just like, ‘I want to be an AP’. I had been grooming myself for leadership for a while.” For example, Farrah worked with parents, other teachers, and students as the yearbook advisor. As the yearbook advisor she was also responsible for maintaining proper financial records and coordinating with the company who printed the yearbook. As a member of the school leadership team, Farrah also participated in discussions about school-wide issues and strategies for improving student achievement. Additionally, Farrah spent one year as an academic coach. Her primary responsibility was to support teachers of students who were struggling academically in reading. She helped to identify the specific needs of each student based on data from in-school assessments and guided the teacher in providing instruction during intervention classes to fill in the academic knowledge gaps for those students.

Gwen worked at a school with a ‘magnet program’, where most of the students were academically high-performing. A magnet program at a school has a specific focus, such as marine science or performing arts, and students need to apply to be accepted into the program. To remain in the magnet program, students must maintain high grades. Gwen was the magnet lead teacher, which meant it was her responsibility to supervise the program and its’ students. Her responsibilities in that position included recruiting students to participate in the program, promoting the program within the community and school district, intervening with students who were struggling academically in the program, meeting with students when there were discipline concerns, and monitoring student progress within the program. For the first year, she was the magnet lead teacher.
for part of the day and a language arts teacher for the other part of the day. The next year she was a fully released magnet lead teacher at her school, a position she held for the next three and a half years. She then relocated to a different magnet school where she served as the magnet lead teacher for eight years before being hired as an AP. Regarding her experience as a magnet lead teacher, Gwen said, “I really liked working at the level where I could influence the curriculum and have an impact on the teachers rather than just students in my classroom. I liked being able to have input and helping the whole school.” During that time Gwen also gained experience with the oversight of standardized assessments as the test chairperson.

Hector’s preparation for the AP role also included coaching positions. He worked as an academic coach in two different subjects, both of which were fully released positions. His responsibilities included supporting teachers in increasing student achievement in specific subject areas. He also worked closely with his administrative team to look at data from the latest student assessments and identify necessary academic resources. Another responsibility within that position was to schedule and lead planning meetings with teachers. During those meeting, Hector reviewed student data with each teacher, led conversations discussing student progress and areas of need, and guided teachers in creating lessons and activities that would engage the students and help them fill in learning gaps.

Ian was also an academic coach. When explaining the reason for pursuing a position as an academic coach, Ian said that he, “transitioned intentionally from the classroom to an academic coach to see that side of the equation and to build up more
curriculum knowledge”. Just as with all the other academic coaches, Ian was responsible for supporting instruction in a specific academic subject in all grades within the school. During that time Ian also wanted to learn more about procedures related to school operations and how to comply with district and state requirements. To do so, Ian became the EESAC chairperson for his school, working closely with the principal. He was also the gradebook manager. In that role he was responsible for ensuring that teachers were following correct procedures for grading students. They also ensured that all teachers had the correct number of grades entered into the electronic gradebook before each quarterly progress report and report card.

When reflecting on her previous positions, Jane said that school administration “has always been my dream”, so she “wanted to make myself marketable”. In that vein, she took classes to earn a reading endorsement for her teaching certificate and classes for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to add another endorsement to her certificate. Her educational background was special education, so she pursued and earned a position as a fully released Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program specialist. That position required her to monitor all students who were a part of the ESE program. Those students had special needs beyond the needs of a student that is not in the ESE program. She supported teachers with students who had learning disabilities, physical impairments, autism, and other exceptionalities that impacted their education. Her job was to ensure compliance with legal requirements for educating students in the ESE program and monitor the progress of students in the ESE program. She was also
responsible for meeting with teachers and parents to make individual academic plans to support the academic achievement of each student.

The one participant that did not report engaging leadership preparation roles within his school site was Alex. While talking about how important he felt it was for him to gain experience before becoming an AP, Alex shared his thoughts regarding gaining a leadership perspective. He purported that, “a lot of times, as a teacher, you’re so into your world that you can’t see outside of it”. However, he gained his leadership knowledge from positions outside the school site.

The opportunities for school-site teacher leadership positions in this large school district are numerous and varied. As prospective APs, participants engaged in leadership activities that enhanced their leadership skills and administrative knowledge of policies, procedures, requirements, and best practices. Many participants also indicated that this deliberate preparation and the ensuing roles helped them to feel prepared when they entered the AP position. Findings indicate that with these participants the theme of deliberate preparation was ubiquitous. See Table 5 below for a list of teacher leadership responsibilities held by each participant prior to their position as an AP.
### Table 5

*Teacher Leadership Responsibilities Prior to AP Position*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Previous Teacher Leadership Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>academic coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test chairperson</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lead teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>activities director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>academic coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saturday school supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>after-school tutoring supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>academic coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leadership team member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>grade-level chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Excellence School Advisory Committee (EESAC) chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saturday school supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>after-school tutoring supervisor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
yearbook advisor

after-school clubs supervisor

Eric grade-level chairperson

Educational Excellence School Advisory Council (EESAC) member

wellness coordinator

Union steward

Farrah academic coach

leadership team member

yearbook advisor

Gwen test chairperson

lead teachers

school improvement coordinator

Hector academic coach in multiple subject areas

Ian academic coach
Principal Support

Principals have been recognized as a key contributor in the identification, encouragement, and development of teacher leaders (Cheng & Szeto, 2016). Within the realm of deliberate preparation for the AP position in their school setting, five of the ten participants shared experiences that illuminated the importance of their principals’ support as they aspired to the assistant principal position.

Betty originally worked with her principal when he was an AP and she was an academic coach. During that time, she was working towards her master’s degree in Educational Leadership and he helped her with her leadership-related assignments. Later, when he got promoted to the position of principal, he invited her to come to his new school and take a position as the lead teacher at his school. She said the following about the experience:

My principal gave me the opportunity to get out of the classroom and become an academic coach. I thought, well, what a great opportunity to look at the world of education in a different lens, because in our classrooms we have a lens that’s very focused on the students. It’s our four walls. But once you move out of that realm,
you see a totally different aspect of education that maybe you didn’t get to see because you were busy with your day-to-day responsibilities.

When describing her position as lead teacher, Betty again referred to the support of her principal, saying, “With my principal’s help, I became the first assistant principal for our school. That’s what led up to this moment (being an AP)”.

Gwen shared a similar experience of strong principal support. The sponsorship and assistance from her principal led to Gwen’s realization that she wanted to pursue an administrative position. Gwen shared the following account:

At my first school, my principal encouraged me to take a leadership role, which is why she made me the magnet lead teacher. I had to train the teachers and I had to oversee how it was being implemented . . . within the first year of doing it, I realized that’s what I liked, and I began my courses for leadership at the University.

As she took classes to earn her certification in Educational Leadership, Gwen’s principal continued to provide her with leadership opportunities. While she was the magnet lead teacher, Gwen was also the test chairperson. She ensured the correct implementation of all standardized assessments administered at the school. Gwen reminisced, “I had many different roles that my principal would give me . . . there were a lot of different hats that I would wear”. While Gwen’s school did not have a formal academic coach role, Gwen served as an informal academic coach for her school. She explained that she attended the district’s monthly meetings for the academic coaches, then shared the information with all the reading teachers in her school. She also worked closely with the administrators on
the school improvement plan, which is a document that is developed yearly and outlines the school’s goals for the year and specific, measurable steps to reach those goals. Of her relationship with her principal, Gwen said, “anything that she [the principal] needed me to help her with, I would help her” thus allowing the principal to distribute leadership and Gwen to gain key knowledge and experience.

It was noted earlier in the findings that Catherine attributed her comfort level with instructional leadership as an AP to her previous position as an academic coach. Regarding her role as an academic coach, Catherine shared that, “I felt like I had a good amount of authority as a coach that was given to me by my previous principal”. David shared a similar sentiment, saying, “I was fortunate enough to get principals that always gave me leadership roles and things to take on . . . all sorts of things that gave me experience outside the classroom.” Regarding the support of his last principal before he became an AP, David shared, “my principal at the time was very willing to help me with anything that I needed.” David’s principal shared many leadership opportunities with him. David explained, “she would rely on me for data. She would rely on me for a lot of things: setting meetings up, getting agendas ready. There was a wide spectrum of things that I learned in that four years I was an academic coach that gave me the tools I needed to be successful in this position.”

Eric also noted that his previous principal gave him leadership responsibilities that contributed to his growth. Eric stated, “even when it came time for field trips at my school, my principal relied on me. I would go check the buses, make sure everything was in place for the field trips . . . it’s things like that. It’s just little small things that just built
my resume up into the leader I am today.” However, Eric also shared experiences related to his previous principal that alluded to a potentially contentious relationship. Eric confided, “When I needed help last year, for example, for a discipline problem. I would ask my principal, ‘Hey, I need help with this.’ She’d turn to me, ‘Well, what are you going to do about it?’ It was to the point where it was stressful, and I was like, ‘Something has to happen’.” However, in addition to his challenges with his principal, Eric also noted the context of the school he worked in while he was engaging in deliberate preparation for an AP position. Eric worked at a school with a large population of students who struggled academically and behaviorally, and a lot of pressure was put on him to ensure that the students in his class made strong academic improvement.

**Preparation Outside the School Setting (region, district)**

Within the school district where this study took place, teachers can apply for teacher leader positions outside the school setting. These positions were described by participants as a “teacher on special assignment”. They were still a part of the ‘teacher’ rank but worked in a specific school district office or regional office and carried out duties related to the office. It was noted that the official job title for that position was ‘curriculum support specialist’. Four of the ten participants held positions as a curriculum support specialist before becoming an AP. The four participants all shared stories regarding how the position outside of the school setting prepared them for the AP position.

To deliberately prepare for her potential role as an AP, Betty “decided to take a position at the district as a curriculum support specialist to further my leadership skills
and kind of branch out a little bit because I had been in my school for a very long time.” She shared, “if I wanted to get ahead, I had to challenge myself to another level.” Betty’s position as a curriculum support specialist was within the science department for the school district and she served in that role for one year. Betty explained that once a struggling school showed improvement, some of the additional human resources, such as science, math, and reading academic coaches that were assigned to the school, were relocated to another school. Her role as a curriculum support specialist was to fill in that gap and act as an academic coach for six or seven schools. She was responsible for creating her schedule and ensuring that she visited all her schools regularly. While she was at a school, her primary focus was to support the teachers with instruction, data analysis, and implementing effective science labs and lessons in the classroom. Betty also helped to develop and present science-focused professional development sessions to hundreds of teachers within the school district. Regarding her role as a curriculum support specialist for the science department, Betty confided, “I felt it was a very transient role for me . . . it was not my favorite. It’s a very lonely position. I like the interaction at the school site. So, when I got the opportunity to come back, I came flying back [to her previous position at the school site]”. However, Betty said that she learned important leadership skills during her year as a curriculum support specialist. She shared the following experience regarding her year as a curriculum support specialist:

I came from a top performing school where people worked really hard. And it was a culture shock for me when I went into some of these schools and there were people that were blatantly like, ‘This is how I teach, so be it.’ That was a big culture shock for me . . .
You have teachers that are resistant and teachers that are eager and want to learn. I think being exposed to that big picture of not just being in my four walls of my old school was a great learning experience for me.

Betty also said that the prestige that came with her role gave her a level of confidence that she didn’t previously possess. Betty explained that most schools have almost a reverent respect for people who work at the district offices and treat them accordingly when they come to visit a school. That treatment allowed her to feel confident in her ability as a leader.

Farrah worked as a curriculum support specialist for two different departments. The first was a department that was responsible for district-wide professional development for teachers, non-instructional staff, and school administrators. One of her key responsibilities was to create training sessions and present those training sessions to teachers and employees across the school district. Farrah also said that within that role she took multiple trips to Washington D.C to give presentations on a peer observation system that she was part of as a curriculum support specialist.

Her second role as a curriculum support specialist was with a department that supported struggling schools. Working within that department, she still served as an instructor for multiple professional development sessions across the school district, but she was also assigned to support a struggling school and the teachers within. She helped those teachers locate and provide appropriate assessments to measure student progress and taught teachers how to disaggregate the resulting data. She then helped the teachers learn how to talk to students about their progress, help students set individual learning
goals, communicate goals and student progress to parents, and follow-up on goals and set new goals as needed. Farrah reminisced that, “a lot of my strengths and those transferable skills that I learned when I was at the district working as a curriculum support specialist have transferred to my new position [as an AP].”

Hector held two roles outside the school setting that he felt contributed to his growth as a leader. One role was as a curriculum support specialist in the language arts department. In that role he supported teachers in a specific region of the district, focusing on several middle schools and high schools. At that time his specialty was in writing instruction. There was a standardized assessment for writing that students had to take in specific grades, so supporting teachers of those students was his primary objective as a curriculum support specialist. Specifically, he was tasked with supporting schools that earned a ‘C’ or lower on the state ranking system for public schools. Hector explained that he met with the assistant principals at each school, who identified teachers in need of support. He described a similar situation to Betty’s situation when he said of the teachers, “trying to implement new things, trying to teach them how to do it a different way was sometimes a challenge, but I was up for the challenge. It was fun.” He also explained that there were new teachers at the schools that he was able to support with writing instruction as well. As he reflected on his experiences as a curriculum support specialist, Hector said, “as a CSS it really helped me out because I was able to visit different schools and meet different administrators. So, in the process, I learned how schools worked, more so middle and high school.” Hector also shared that he pursued a one-year state support specialist position funded by a grant. That position was working for the neighboring
school district to support elementary schools academically. Hector also had the opportunity to visit the state capitol multiple times and was responsible for taking the information he gained there and sharing it with the schools he supported throughout that year. Hector explained that when he worked in his current school district he learned about the operations of middle and high schools, and with the state support specialist position, he gained familiarity with the elementary school level.

Like Farrah, Jane also held two curriculum support specialist positions in preparation for an AP position. Jane held her first curriculum support specialist position for four years. In that role, her primary responsibility was to serve as a mentor to teachers at a specific school. During her tenure, she conducted informal classroom visits and provided formative feedback, in-class support, and modeled lessons to support the professional growth of teachers. The overall focus of that position was to encourage teacher-to-teacher conversations where peers supported one another, collaboratively problem solved, and created lesson plans together with a unified goal of increasing school-wide student achievement. Her other role as a curriculum support specialist was in the office that was responsible for professional development. Her specific area of focus was to support the professional development needs of non-instructional staff. She was tasked with helping supervise programs, events, and learning opportunities for paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals are adults who support another teacher, such as a teacher of pre-kindergarten or a teacher of students with special needs. Typically, those paraprofessionals do not hold 4-year college degrees and do not have teaching certificates. The program that Jane worked with helped interested paraprofessionals to
gain the necessary education, training, and credentials to become certified teachers. Jane noted that she met many people during her time as curriculum support specialist who have now become valuable resources for her as a novice AP.

Alex had a different role than the other APs who worked as curriculum support specialists for different district offices. Alex was a teacher trainer with one of the regional offices. Alex described his situation as follows:

I had a really different experience than most people that started in their career to be an AP. I worked at the region level before I started as an AP. And so I worked with all of the APs and I worked with all of the principals. So, subsequently, at least for me, it was a lot easier to transition into an assistant principal position because I participated in all of the meetings. I went to all of the principal meetings as well as the assistant principal meetings. I was in a lot of the Data Com’s [an annual data-focused meeting that all principals are required to attend]. I used to prepare for those [Data Com meetings] for the region directors and for the superintendent. So I had a weird intro into assistant principal life.

Just like Jane, Alex noted that the people in his previous position have become people that he can contact with questions or concerns in his current position as an AP. Alex explained the following:

Luckily, I’ve had the experience where I’ve worked with all of the APs in the region and I know most by name. I have been able to just pick up the phone on a Saturday and say, ‘Hey, how do you do this?’ or ‘How are you doing this at your school?’
He also shared the experience of several other participants where his previous experience helped to solidify his desire to become an AP. Alex described the following regarding the similarities between his previous position and his current position:

They are kind of abstract. You have to figure out how to make things work, given what you have, and try to be creative as much as you can within the laws, and I like doing that. I don’t know why. I kind of like the chaos, and then trying to make sense of the chaos and trying to fix things. And when it gets fixed, you get a momentary happy sticker in your head, and then you go on to the next thing.

While Alex explained many ways in which his previous position as a teacher trainer helped prepare him for the AP position, he also noted some gaps. He explained that his job at the regional office was, “very analytical and had to do with a lot of numbers and visiting schools . . . but it had very little to do with procedural things. And procedural things are how schools run”. Alex explained that he relies greatly on colleagues and former colleagues to help him fill in his gaps of knowledge. Table 6 below lists the participants’ leadership roles they assumed outside the school setting before being hired as an AP.
Table 6
Preparatory Roles Outside the School Setting Prior to AP Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Leadership Role Outside School Setting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>curriculum support specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrah</td>
<td>curriculum support specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector</td>
<td>curriculum support specialist</td>
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<td></td>
<td>state support specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>peer reviewer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>curriculum support specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>teacher trainer</td>
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Challenges

Another theme uncovered during data analysis was the prevalence of challenges the novice APs faced. At times, the challenges were quite overpowering. Hector described the difficulty of the new role saying, “Have I had moments where I have wanted to go in a corner and cry? Absolutely. And I’m man enough to admit it.” David echoed that sentiment and said,
“It’s challenging. Very, very challenging. Everything about this job is very challenging.” While the challenges were many, participants had different views about the most challenging aspects of the AP position.

**Volume of Work/Hours Working**

The challenge mentioned most by the participants was the volume of work, which they said led to working very long hours. Six out of ten participants indicated that the amount of work and the associated hours have been one of the biggest challenges for them to overcome as they transitioned into their new administrative role. Of the volume of work, Alex explained that, “you’re fumbling everything because you’re trying to juggle the whole wide world, and you try to Atlas the heck out of this thing and carry everything.” David insisted, “There’s just too much to manage for one person. It’s just too much.” Sentiments such as these were common among participants.

The volume of work invariably led to frequent long workdays, including nights and weekends, for eight of ten participants. Ian described the work hours noting that, “the day doesn’t end, doesn’t begin . . . It’s really just full-time, if done correctly.” When comparing the volume of work from her previous role to her current role, Betty described the following scenario:

I think when I was in the classroom it was easier . . . That didn’t get graded? Well, okay, tomorrow when I’m planning, I’ll finish grading. But that’s not so easy when you’re in an administrative role, because if you have an email and it says you need to answer by five, well you need to answer by five . . . It’s got to be done. There’s no gray in administration.
Regarding the volume of work, Catherine observed, “I think the big challenge is just getting done all of the things that you need to do. It never happens, so you end up taking a bunch of work home.” She added that if “there’s an incident, and it takes up three hours of your day . . . you’ve got to stay late, or you’ve got to take it home and get it done.”

Many APs described the long hours that they typically work. Catherine said that she leaves her house at six thirty in the morning and usually does not return home until seven o’clock in the evening. Gwen shared that while the students leave school at three o’clock in the afternoon, she’s at work “usually until almost six o’clock in the evening. David said that, “a lot of times, we’re the first car in that parking lot. And a lot of times we’re the last car in that parking lot.” Regarding his normal work hours, Hector stated, “I’m usually here by six thirty in the morning. I’m leaving here at five, five thirty . . . days where I’ve left at seven or eight. I put in twelve-, thirteen-, fourteen-hour days. I’m exhausted.” With respect to his working hours, Ian noted the following:

I try to leave by five o’clock, spend a few hours with them (his family) and then once they go to bed . . . I have that time to be able to dedicate to my work . . . I try not to work every night, but maybe a Tuesday and a Thursday probably staying up later . . . so I don’t have to get that much work done over the weekend.

Despite the long hours described by most participants, two novice APs shared that they do not regularly stay at work after hours or take work home. Jane shared that, “she (Jane’s principal) doesn’t believe in me staying here late and she doesn’t believe in working on the weekends, so I do applaud her for that. Whatever we have to do, we’re
going to get it done here, before we leave.” Eric shared a similar thought, “When I get home, I’m daddy. I don’t take any work home.”

**Prioritizing Tasks**

For the participants, learning how to prioritize their tasks was a challenge that many were in the process of overcoming. David explained the importance of, “knowing what can wait until the next day and what is absolute priority.” Betty shared that, “I think once I realized, okay, these are ‘have-to’s’. It doesn’t matter if I like it or if I don’t want to do it, it’s got to be done. That’s how I organize my day.” Farrah concluded, “emails were one of those things that I kind of had to realize, it’s not a fire if it came through email . . . I can give myself twenty-four hours to get back to it. Sometimes even forty-eight hours”.

**Number of Duties**

A related challenge expressed by multiple participants was the difficulty of fulfilling all responsibilities, due to the volume of duties and the number of daily interruptions from students, teachers, and parents. Upon reflecting on his duties, Ian shared, “I think my responsibilities are two pages long of just listed items.” An examination of all duties mentioned by the participants in this study uncovered the following thirty-five duties, each mentioned at least once by a participant: input student referrals; parking issues; parent meetings; monitor student attendance; students (student discipline; manage students’ safety/emotional health); coordinate school-wide safety drills; oversee state standardized testing; supervise afterschool activities; teacher observations/evaluations; support teachers; coordinate substitute teachers; cafeteria duty;
arrival and dismissal duty; manage special education programming; observe teaching; plan for school-wide initiatives; lead meetings; enact district mandates; monitor bilingual student programs; supervise academic coaches; facilitate curriculum meetings; oversee custodial matters and personnel; coordinate building maintenance; monitor student intervention groups; monitor student academic data; oversee district-mandated testing; support before- and after-school tutoring programs; supervise cafeteria staff; participate in home visits; create the master schedule; supervise security personnel; supervise office staff; coordinate professional development activities; facilitate student promotion/retention procedures and coordinate special events. David explained his balancing act as follows:

You have parents that just pop in, that just want to see you for various reasons. So, you’ve got to be prepared for that. Things happen. You have to be available on the radio. You have to be able to listen to the radio, even when you’re doing twelve other things. You always have to be available.

Pressure of Being a Supervisor

Not only did participants experience challenges related to the volume of duties, but many participants also expressed the concerns they had related to the pressures of their supervisory duties and the extreme level of responsibility they felt. Betty described the responsibility of supervising teachers, particularly the challenges she faced regarding teacher evaluations. She felt that as an AP you essentially held “someone’s job in your hand”, and that was something very new to her. Gwen described students with emotional
struggles who, “sometimes speak of suicide . . . it’s a big responsibility to care for their lives.” Gwen also provided the following account:

As I was sharing with somebody the other day, it’s not the amount of work that exhausts me. I’m used to working a lot and I can handle a lot of work. It’s the amount of responsibility that is exhausting. I’m responsible for students’ education, sometimes their lives, the deadlines, legal things. It’s added responsibility that I didn’t have as a teacher . . . Students sometimes get injured. It’s happened a few times. Luckily the injuries were not anything severe, but we’ve had students injured. I’ve had to react and know what to do. I’ve had a student having an asthma attack. That’s something that I need to be able to handle. Who do they go to when there’s an emergency? They go to the administrator . . . The administrator has to be able to deal with that in a manner that is efficient, fast, and calm, because the administrator can’t freak out. The administrator has to be able to handle these things. I can do it, but it’s very stressful. These are people’s children.

Gwen was not the only participant who specifically mentioned the challenge of insuring student safety as part of the AP role. Ian explained the responsibility APs have for student health when he provided a description of the following experience:

Just today as I was leaving for a workshop, a student came down with chest pains. Luckily, my other assistant principal was able to deal with it since I was leaving the building. But that essentially puts everything on hold and now you have to deal with the student and ensuring their safety or their well-being.
Hector shared the following account of his principal providing advice regarding the importance of enacting the role of a supervisor:

When I first got appointed, my principal told me, ‘You are the eye of the storm. Everything around you could be falling apart. You keep it together and never . . . look like you’re sweating.’ So, the storm is all around me, but I’m keeping it cool.

Participants also shared experiences related to how their high level of responsibility manifested itself in feeling accountable for what happens in every facet of the school. Betty felt that, “an AP is involved in every aspect of the school. Hector offered a concurrent view that, “everything falls on me.” Referring to the whole school community including teachers, students and parents, Eric said, “they bring everything to me.” David shared the following similar view:

There’s just so many things, or an eye that you have to have . . . It’s like an all-seeing eye. You always have to be on. Always. Because when you let your eye off something, something will eventually fall off the track.

Later in his interview, David confided, “It’s just the responsibility for everything . . . everything comes back to you . . . It’s your building, and everything comes back to you.”

**Students’ Emotional Struggles**

A common transition issue mentioned by most participants was the challenge the novice APs faced when confronting students’ emotional struggles. This was a difficulty the participants expressed facing frequently, and one that they thought about the most when they were not physically at work. Betty shared the following thoughts on her role in ensuring students’ emotional well-being:
There are obviously some harder days than others . . . You’re exposed to a lot of emotional incidents, for lack of a better term . . . The emotional aspect of the job is very hard to turn off because you go home and you think, ‘Oh my God, is that child okay? Did I do everything I could have done? Did I make sure that the services are in place for that child?’ All of these things weigh heavily on your mind.

Farrah also shared her experience supporting students emotionally as follows:

I think it’s (AP position) the hardest job in the district . . . this is my fourth title in the district. This is the hardest job that I’ve ever had. It takes an emotional toll on you in a way . . . Like right now. You don’t see her, but I’m sitting here with one of my students, one of my babies. She’s still here with me at 3:30pm (90 minutes after student dismissal) because of a difficult home situation. This takes an emotional toll on you.

Hector shared a story of an emotionally charged environment in the first school he was assigned as an AP. He noted, “there were so many discipline issues that the following year I heard that the principal had to get a Dean of Discipline just to be able to handle all those cases. There were fights left and right.” Alex and Hector shared similar experiences regarding students who also struggle with food insecurity. Hector explained the following:

You never know what they’re going through in their own lives . . . some of those children, the (school-provided) breakfast and lunch were the only meal they would get all day . . . my God, and then we are asking them to stay in class, to learn when they haven’t even eaten.
Alex described a similar case in the following scenario:

I have a kid that only eats breakfast and lunch, and this (school) is his only constant, whether he knows it or not. This is his only constant in life. He comes to school every day, he has six teachers, he has breakfast, he has lunch, he greets everybody, and he has friends. But as soon as he goes home, it could be anything . . . so you have to learn to appreciate that.

**Coping Strategies**

One of the primary elements of Schlossberg’s transition theory is the ‘4 S System’, which provides a means for examining factors that influence one’s transitional experience and related coping mechanisms (Schlossberg, 2011). As described previously, the 4 S’s refer to the situation surrounding the transition, strategies employed while coping with a transition, support experienced during a transition, and factors related to the self, including personal psychological resources (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). The following sections will describe findings related to the 4 S’s of Schlossberg’s transition theory.

Schlossberg (2011) contends that individuals undergoing a transition employ certain coping behaviors to “prevent, alleviate, or respond to stressful situations” (p. 87). The findings of this study indicate that novice APs frequently utilize coping strategies that attempt to modify their current situation. The following section will describe findings that relate to situational coping strategies including working additional hours, organization, and time management.
**Working additional hours**

While extended working hours was described as a challenge by six of the ten participants, it was also described as a coping response. According to Schlossberg’s transition theory, one way to cope with a stressful situation is to control or modify the situation to alter the source of strain (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). In this research, half of the participants countered the volume of work, number of duties, and frequency of new tasks to learn by working additional hours. Gwen said that she’s usually at work “until almost six o’clock doing reports or emails or looking at data or calling parents.” Ian controlled his volume of work in a similar manner, sharing the following:

- I leave it for the end of the day and honestly, I leave it for nighttime at home.
- That’s the only time that it’s quiet enough for me to be able to concentrate and be able to answer those emails or get whatever work done that I need to do paperwork-wise.

Participants indicated a view that the act of working additional hours was a way to feel successful at work and respond proactively to the demands of their job. If they could complete the more time-consuming work outside of normal school hours, they were more available at work to focus on the myriad of spontaneous situations that came to them during the day. Regarding arriving at work early every day, Hector explained, “I’m an early bird, so the moment I arrive I like to get some work done.” Alex had two different strategies he employed to respond to the workload, described as follows:

- In a high school, there’s times where you have night games and games that start later in the afternoon . . . since I live far enough away, I’m not going to drive
home. I’m just going to stay for the game and just knock out all the stuff I have to do, like the paperwork . . . Sometimes I’ll come in on a Saturday, to get stuff done, just because I like to get ready for the next week . . . and I could just come in for two hours and get everything done that I need to do in the week . . . it’s not a bad deal.

**Organization**

Another coping response utilized by novice APs in their transition to their new administrative role was to organize their tasks. Betty explained how she used her calendar to monitor due dates and required tasks, which helped her to prioritize her day and week. David, noting the fast pace of the job, described how he always uses technology to keep student data and other pertinent information with him via usage of the online tools. He opined that he was rarely in his office when he needed access to a document, so he found a way to bring his office to his cellular phone and tablet.

**Time management**

Several participants successfully implemented schedules for themselves to cope with their varied responsibilities. Farrah noted the following:

I hold student office hours during lunch. One of the things that I found was becoming an issue was students were wanting to come and talk all day . . . and that was pulling me away from some of my other responsibilities.

With the help of office staff, Catherine successfully managed her time, particularly when she had deadlines to meet. She shared the following scenario:
There are times in the day where I just have to . . . tell my office staff, ‘Hey, I’m in the office, but I really need to get this done, so I need twenty minutes of peace,’ and they’ll tell me, ‘It’s okay. We’ll just close the door and just do your thing.’ And so, they’re kind of like my security guards, which is awesome because if you don’t have the support of your office staff, everything will get through to you. You’ve got to have some barriers.

However, the participants also quickly acknowledged that time management is not always something that they can control. David explained, “even though you plan, and you try to have a plan, things can go awry very quickly.” Farrah admitted, “it doesn’t matter how often I write a to-do list. I never get to it all. I can’t even adhere to it, because there are things that come up during the day that need immediate responsiveness.” To put it into context, Farrah explained how she frequently begins her day:

I come in . . . and I like to set the stage for the day. I want to put on my gospel music, and put some sage in here. And I mean, you walk in and Department of Children and Families (DCF) is here, or the police are here, and there’s an irate parent, and it’s learning how to really prioritize things that directly impact students, but then also being mindful of timelines and deadlines and really being able to balance that.

Likewise, Hector conceded to the following:

In control? That doesn’t exist. You can be in control of yourself. You can be in control of your behavior. But I can’t control. There are certain things that when
the region wants it, they want it. Okay, I’ve got to do it. I can’t say, ‘No, you get it tomorrow,’ because they want it now.

One participant was an outlier in the degree to which he tried to control his situation.

David shared experiences where he tried to control all aspects of his situation rather than some. He stated that, “The goal is to keep monitoring everybody in the building. Everybody has to be monitored.” During the interview, David shared his experiences in a typical day as a novice AP. As he outlined his day for the researcher, David shared questions that he asked himself during the day. For example, David described his morning routine as follows:

Is the teacher parking lot available? Can teachers get in? Is the grass cut? Is there too much paper on the floor? I’m just going through the beginning of the day. Is the cafeteria ready? Are the garbage bags placed? Is the air conditioner on? Are all the lights functioning? Do we have internet? All of those things are processing in that morning, getting started for the day, because if any of those things fail, I’ve got to get on it right away.

David shared the following, similar thought process for end-of-the-day procedures:

At the end of the day . . . we have kids in tutoring. Do the teachers have their rosters ready to go? Do they know who they're picking up, who they're not picking up? We do have a big tutoring program here after school. If there are snacks involved, does the cafeteria manager have that set up? Do we have them going to the right location? What kind of Instructional Focus Calendars (IFCs), do the tutors have in place? What materials are they using? How’s our attendance? Is
our attendance low in third grade? Why is it low? Why are we missing some
students? Do we need to make phone calls?

David shared sixty-eight such questions during the interview. Although some of
his concerns were related to things within his control, most were not. While it is an
extreme example, this novice APs overarching coping strategy was an attempt to control
his situation.

However, there was also one AP who experienced high amounts of success with
her time management strategy, in cooperation with her supervising principal. Together,
Jane and her principal implemented what they referred to as a “two by five” schedule.
She described a scenario where the two administrators essentially split their day in half.
One administrator visits classrooms and focuses on matters that need the attention of an
administrator while the other is in the office working on paperwork and meeting
deadlines. Then, they switch. Although Jane said that she still had unexpected situations
to attend to, such as, “a day where our EBD (Emotionally and Behaviorally Disturbed)
kids are just out of control. Then, I have to go down there and try to calm them down or
somebody’s got to go home”, However, Jane said that their two by five schedule usually
works well for her and her principal. It is also noteworthy that Jane is one of only two
participants who does not take work home, and rarely stays at work more than half an
hour extra daily. See Table 7 below for a summary of the commonly mentioned
challenges of the new role.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percent Who Mentioned this Challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volume of Work/Hours Working</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Emotional Struggles</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure of Being a Supervisor</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing Tasks</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Duties</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of New Tasks to Learn</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervising Teachers</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruptions</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Experience in Current School Level</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance Work Life and Personal Life</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Barrier with Students’ Family Members</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Position Not at School Site</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Construction</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Support Mechanisms

“Support is often said to be the key to handling stress” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 83). Schlossberg (2011) defines support in terms of the source of support. Support sources are classified as “intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the people are a part” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 85). For the purposes of clarity, the sources of support that emerged during this research will be categorized as being either informal support or formal support. The sources of informal support participants described included the following: other APs at other schools, the principal serving at the participants’ school, other APs at the participants’ current school, district staff, and a spouse or other family members. The sources of formal support participants elucidated are as follows: The Build Excellence in Novice leaders through Challenges and High Expectations (BENCH) program, an AP induction program, monthly AP meetings, and Instructional Rounds.

Informal support.

Informal support was acknowledged by all participants as being a fundamental component of their transition into their new administrative role. Participants described the following main sources of informal support: (a) other APs at other schools, (b) current school principal, (c) other APs at current school, (d) district staff, and (e) spouse and/or other family members.

Other APs at other schools.

The only source of informal support that was utilized by all novice APs was the assistance of their peers: APs at other schools. For example, Catherine did not mention
support from the other AP at her current school, nor did she discuss support from her
supervising principal, but in the following description she explained how heavily she
relied upon other APs at other schools:

If I don't know how to do something, or I'm not sure what the process is, or I don't
know what the right form is, or I encountered an issue I've never encountered
before, I know I have a strong support system of people that I know I can count
on . . . people who I know have as little time as I do, who will always stop and
give me two minutes of their time if I need advice, or I need support, or I need
help with something. They guide me in the right direction. So that's been the
biggest thing for me is to know that I have a network of people that I can count
on.

Betty also explained that her AP peers have been a key resource for her. She said that it
has been important to, “tap into your resources of those peers . . . you don't know
everything and that's okay. Obviously reach out to people. Everybody's always willing to
help. You're going to find very few people that don't help out there.” For some APs, this
informal support network developed organically. Hector described a relationship of
mutual support between himself and a colleague. Hector said, “he called me a few weeks
ago for something and I helped him. Then, boom, I called him for something else and he
helped me. Little did I know we could network like this, but it's important.” Other APs
approached the development of their informal support network more intentionally. Eric
explained that he was, “building that rapport up with other APs in my region to have that
nest for me, just in case if I need help with something.”
Current school principal.

Six of the ten participating novice APs referred to their current principal as a source of informal support. While principals in this school district have no official duties of mentorship assigned to them regarding their assistant principals, participants described principals who were guiding and supporting them. Betty emphasized that, “I have a wonderful principal who thankfully is just one of those types of principals that’s super supportive. He takes the time to make sure you’re learning. He takes the time to make sure you’re okay.” Gwen contributed, “My principal is very supportive, and I go to her with whatever questions or concerns I have. She guides me and she points me towards the resources I need.”

Participants also described their principals’ understanding of the learning curve inherent for their novice APs’. Alex shared that his principal has been, “extremely helpful and open to the fact that I know that I don’t know.” Similarly, David expressed the following feelings regarding the support of his principal:

Having a supportive principal is key. I don’t know how I could do this job if I didn’t have a person who was as willing to teach and be supportive and understanding and tough . . . don’t get me wrong, but able to understand mistakes that happen. Without that person, I would say this would be a very, very challenging job. Even more so.

In addition to supporting Jane’s learning curve, her principal works with her to ensure that large tasks are accomplished collaboratively. Jane explained of her principal, “if
there’s a major activity or project that we’re doing, then she makes sure that we’re working together to make sure that we get it done and we don’t stay late.”

Three participants describe a less supportive relationship between them and their principal. Catherine divulged, “you can’t ask your principal . . . because they’re equally as busy as you are”. Hector noted that his principal is very organized, but disclosed that her approach entails, “too much micromanaging . . . I know I have things to do, but don’t remind me every hour, every two hours.” Farrah stated that it is her principal’s first year as a principal at that school.

Other APs at current school.

Three of the participants were the only AP at their school. Of the remaining participants, five out of seven stated that the support of their AP colleagues at their school site has been beneficial. Alex said that the AP he works with has made the transition easier and explained things that he was unfamiliar with. Eric, who supervises the elementary portion of a kindergarten through eighth grade center (K-8 Center) explained that his AP counterpart for grades six through eight has been, “showing me the ropes of the middle school side, because I’m so used to elementary.” He also expressed that she assists with tasks related to school operations. Farrah described a relationship where her AP partners will work together if the workload becomes too much for one AP. There are three full-time APs and one part-time AP at the high school where she works. She shared that, “we’ll help each other. If I’m slammed with something, my colleagues will help pick up my responsibilities.”
One relationship between a novice AP and the other AP at her school was described in a very different manner than those with support from their AP counterparts. Catherine explained that the other AP and the principal have worked together for many years, and that as the newest member of administration, she anticipated a period of transition as they built a new team together. Her experiential stories pointed to a potentially strained relationship. She pondered:

I don’t think that we’re in conflict with each other or anything like that. It was just a matter for me . . . I don’t have that kind of personality anyway. I’m not a conflictive personality. I get they do things a certain way, that they’ve done things a certain way.

While she did not directly mention a conflict, it was observed that her tone of voice changed when she spoke about the other assistant principal and the principal. When describing their relationship, Catherine spoke much more softly with halting speech that was not observed during the rest of the interview. The researcher left with an impression that the relationship was tense rather than supportive.

*District staff.*

Several of the participants expressed that they experienced informal support from district staff. In those three cases, the relationships were pre-existing from their previous roles within the school district. The participants who transitioned from a role working in school district offices before becoming an AP acknowledged the support they received from their previous colleagues. They expressed that the transition was easier for them
because they had cultivated relationships in many different departments, affording them a broad array of assistance as a novice AP.

*Spouse/family.*

Another form of support experienced by the novice APs came from their spouse or family members. Hector confided, “I’ll always ponder and question and ask my wife. Not because she’s my wife, but she’s the smartest woman I’ve ever met. We’ll talk things out, and she’ll give me an idea.” Alex shared the recent support that he has been experiencing from his two daughters. While the transition was an adjustment for them in the beginning, particularly getting used to his longer working hours, he said that they have “come around” and are getting used to his new administrative position. He expressed great joy when his eldest daughter wrote the name of the high school where he works as one of her top three choices when she begins attending high school next year. Alex’s daughter said, “I’ll just go to school with you!” See Table 8 below for a summary of the most utilized sources of informal support by novice APs.

**Table 8**

*Sources of Informal Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Support</th>
<th>Number of Participants Who Experience This Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other APs at Other Schools</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current School Principal</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Formal support.

The school district in which this research was conducted provides several programs for aspiring APs and novice APs. Monthly meetings are also provided to all APs, regardless of years of experience. The following formal support programs were described by the novice APs: (a) BENCH program, (b) AP induction program, (c) monthly AP meetings, and (d) instructional rounds.

**BENCH program.**

Participants described the Build Excellence in Novice leaders through Challenges and High Expectations (BENCH) program as a one-year program for aspiring assistant principals. Participants had to complete an application and submit a resume to apply for this program. After those documents were reviewed, select applicants were granted interviews and program participants were selected. Participants met once a month to learn about topics related to the AP position, participated in scenarios and role-play activities, were guided in the process of revising their resumes, and the AP application process was
explained in depth. Each month they were given the task of completing activities that would demonstrate their competence in specific leadership standards. Participants were also involved in a week-long internship during which time they did a job-shadow with a current AP at another school.

Six participants were a part of the BENCH program. All six participants said the program helped them to feel more prepared to become an AP and provided information that they use in their current position. Alex, Farrah, and Ian stated that the one-week internship was a valuable opportunity for them. Ian suggested that they extend the internship, possibly to two weeks, to give a better idea of the daily expectations of APs. Catherine particularly appreciated the opportunity to meet other aspiring APs that were potential future colleagues who could support one another. Catherine also said that she has been able to reach out to the district staff that supervised the BENCH program. She said they made participants feel comfortable, telling them that as aspiring and current APs they were always free to reach out to the district staff supervising this preparation program. Gwen noted that the real-life scenarios had the most practical application for her. Regarding a mock scenario involving alleged abuse by a teacher Gwen said, “This is one of the things I’ve already dealt with this year as an assistant principal. If a teacher is accused of hitting a child or something like that, there is a process for that. That was very helpful.”

*AP induction program.*

Another district-sponsored program was the AP Induction program. Participants explained that all new assistant principals are automatically part of the AP Induction
Program, which they described as a one-year program that meets monthly to enhance their knowledge of policies, procedures, and where to find the resources they will need as APs. Meeting topics described by participants included student discipline documentation, sanitation audits, human resources, custodial procedures, online platform usage, payroll, and procurement. Catherine noted that representatives from the topic of each meeting were present to share information. She provided an example that if the monthly topic was sanitation audits, a leader from the sanitation department attended the meeting, explained procedures, and shared resources and contact information. Catherine found that to be a particularly helpful aspect of the induction program.

Catherine, Gwen, and Ian all shared their belief that the AP Induction was of more value to them than the BENCH Program. They cited the relevance of the presentations and topics covered to their current position as APs as the primary reason. David added that he would have preferred for it to be a two-year program rather than a one-year program. Related to the AP Induction program, Ian shared the following:

I would say that the induction program is definitely more useful in terms of the content that’s being presented. It’s more applicable to what I’m doing now. The BENCH ones were more of activities and it was up to me to really determine which activity I could do for each leadership standard. Here (AP induction program), it’s more job related directly, so I find them to be more useful.

Another shared belief was that the AP Induction program provided novice APs the valuable opportunity to collaborate with other novice APs. Catherine and David both
expressed the comfort they felt when they realized that they were not alone. Catherine shared the following:

Those relationships and that network that you build with people in your cohort is super helpful . . . just to say, ‘Hey, this person works across the street. I can give them a call if I need a microphone or something.’ Or say, ‘I don’t ever eat lunch’ and for somebody else to say, ‘I don’t ever eat lunch either!’ just makes you feel like, ‘Okay, it’s not just me. I’m not the only one who doesn’t have time for lunch.’

Betty shared her thoughts saying, “the opportunity to work with other new assistant principals helps you to realize number one, you’re not alone. And number two, yes there’s a lot to learn, but look, these are the places where you can go for those resources.”

David offered a similar feeling and said, “It’s about meeting the other APs in your same position. That’s key. Other APs that are in your same boat, meaning new.” Later in the interview, David also shared the following sentiment related to the practical and emotional necessity of interacting with peers in the AP Induction program:

Meeting other APs and becoming friends and bonding with them is extremely, extremely important because you really . . . They understand what you're going through, and there's this bond. There's this special . . . It's just something about talking to another AP that you just feel, oh, yeah, they get it. It's just because they're in it, and having those resources, having those people to reach out to brings a lot of comfort. Because if I don't know something, I can call somebody.
And, if they don't know something, then I could call somebody else, you know what I mean? It's just super important to have that support system.

**Monthly AP meetings.**

All APs in the school district are required to attend a meeting for APs once a month. Hector explained that the purpose of the meetings is so that school district and regional leaders can share the newest, most relevant information. He explained, “they’ll give us the latest information that we then take back to our school. We talk about it in our curriculum leadership meetings (at the school site) and then we talk about it in the faculty meetings (at the school site), so they (the teachers) know what’s going on.” David explained the value in those meetings as it related to support from colleagues. He said that at the AP meetings, “you really get to meet other more experienced APs, and that brings a different set of resources. It’s good to know people who are more seasoned because you get different perspectives, and you get different sets of advice”.

**Instructional rounds.**

All APs also participate in Instructional Rounds, which is an opportunity to learn how to provide constructive feedback to teachers based on observations made when visiting classrooms. Instructional rounds are directly related to an APs’ teacher supervision duties. Hector explained that to begin Instructional Rounds, the participating APs are divided into cohorts who then meet at a school to observe a specific subject being taught, such as English Language Arts, Math, Science, or Writing. He said that there are 4 Instructional Rounds each year, and each round has a different subject as the focus. When the AP cohort arrives at the school, they discuss the subject focus and their
expectations. He said they then break into smaller groups and visit three different classrooms. While in the classrooms, they peruse teacher lesson plans and observe the classroom instruction. After the observation, the AP cohort reconvenes to discuss positive observations, opportunities for growth, and potential next steps an AP should take after making such observations. Only two novice APs, Hector and Jane, mentioned the Instructional Rounds during the course of the interviews. They both said they found value in the opportunity to meet with other APs and observe teaching and learning at another school site.

**Personal Attributes**

According to Schlossberg’s transition theory, the *self* includes psychological resources and personal attributes one possesses that greatly influence the way one copes with a transition (Schlossberg, 2011). Findings indicate that the following personal attributes played a key role in the transition of novice APs into their new role: (a) determination, (b) confidence, (c) focus, and (d) positivity.

**Determination**

All the participants shared responses that demonstrated their ability to confront the challenges of being a novice AP and their determination to fulfill their job requirements. Catherine shared, “There’s some stuff that you just have to learn by doing it. I know they tell you that, but it’s true. Oh, and read the manuals. All of the manuals that are available. Find them, get them, read them!” Farrah echoed, “you learn on the job, really. But some things, you have to study. Literally, my internal funds binder looks like
one of my textbooks from college.” The following account from Gwen demonstrates similar determination for success when she shared her thoughts on work-life balance:

Right now, I’m just trying to make sure that I’m doing everything right; that I’m learning everything I need to learn. That becomes more of a priority to me than, for instance, resting or going out and spending time with family or friends. I think the balance will come in after I begin to feel more comfortable and confident with what I’m doing . . . this is my main focus right now.

Confidence

All participants expressed that there were many things that they did not yet know, but also that they expected to encounter many unknown tasks in their new role. Although they all experienced a large learning curve, many participants approached that learning curve with confidence. David shared the following thought when he considered his progress:

I’m not an expert at anything that I just told you. But I’m working on becoming better at all of these things each and every day. And the overall confidence that I have is that I am better than I was a year ago . . . and I’m confident that’s only going to get better.

Gwen shared a similar confidence and said that, “based on the past when I’ve taken on new duties, I think that once I get the hang of this new position and I feel comfortable with what I’m doing I’ll feel confident that I’m doing it correctly.” Catherine said that for her it was a matter of “giving myself the space to know I’m going to get it”. David expressed, “I think it’s just a buildup of all of the experiences that really build you as a
leader and gives you the confidence to feel like you can handle it.” Hector exuded confidence when he confided, “I pushed myself, and now that I’m here (an AP), I want the next level because I love what I see the principal doing.”

**Focus**

Most participants shared a similar focus on the students during the interviews. When explaining the challenges of implementing a new program at her school Jane said, “If I have to go above and beyond to make it happen, I’m going to do that. That’s the bottom line. This is for the students” Hector shared the following thoughts regarding how he re-focuses himself on particularly challenging days:

> When you see a child, I’m blessed here with the little ones, but I’ve had the same blessing with high schoolers, where you see the fruit of your labor . . . when they thank you for something that you’ve done that really wasn’t that important, or you thought it wasn’t, but it was to them. You never know what impact you have on a child.

Many participants acknowledged that their focus remains on the students, and that focus helps them make difficult decisions or have difficult conversations because they know that it is in the best interest of the students.

**Positivity**

Six of the ten participants expressed strong positive feelings toward their AP position, multiple times throughout their interviews. Betty said, “my work is very important to me. I love what I do.” Hector divulged, “It’s just, it’s a wonderful thing. I couldn’t love it more. My wife, every once in a while, she sees that I’m stressed and I tell
her, ‘No, but I love what I do. I really do.’” Ian shared, “I like where I’m at. I like what I’m doing.” Jane expressed, “I like to be challenged, so this is a good mix for me because I never know what I may face when I come in here the next day . . . so I think that’s what I like most about this job.” Eric shared his positive feelings regarding his new position and his new school when he said, “I just love it here . . . They’re going to have to take me out of here in handcuffs if they want to get me away from here. I truly love being here.”

The next chapter will discuss the responses to the research questions, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and limitations of the study.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter discusses the following: (a) responses to the research questions, (b) implications for practice, (c) recommendations for future research, and (d) limitations of the study.

Responses to the Research Questions

The discussion begins with responses to each of the four secondary research questions and concludes with a response to the primary research question.

Secondary Research Question 1: What are the most salient transition issues faced by novice assistant principals?

The most salient transition issues faced by novice APs were related to changes from their previous responsibilities to their responsibilities as an AP. Specifically, participants indicated transition issues regarding their responsibilities related to regional and district staff, their school principal, parents, teachers, and students. This discussion will include how the novice APs’ responsibility as it relates to each group changed in scope, importance, and urgency after they transitioned into their new role.

Responsibilities related to regional and district staff

Transition theory explains that enacting a new role entails meeting the expectations of that new role (Anderson et al., 2012). Participants found that the expectations of APs, including novice APs, involved the necessity of fulfilling responsibilities to a new group of individuals: regional and district staff upper management. In their previous position, most participants were not directly responsible
for completing tasks for regional and district upper managers. Some participants who worked in school district office positions prior to becoming an AP were responsible for completing tasks requested by middle managers in district offices. Those who worked at school sites prior to becoming an AP had no experience reporting to upper management in regional and district offices. The one exception was Alex, who worked in the regional offices and reported to upper management in both the regional and district offices.

As an AP, tasks are frequently assigned by upper management in regional and district offices and expeditious and accurate completion is the described expectation. Some tasks are sent to the principal, who delegates the responsibility to the AP, and some tasks are sent directly to APs via email. Tasks assigned by the regional or district offices were described by most participants as being much more challenging than what they experienced as teachers, academic coaches, or curriculum support specialists. Participants continually expressed issues related to the challenge of transitioning into a role with such high expectations from regional and district staff. They shared stories related to the urgency of tasks from regional and district upper management and the challenges they faced meeting those deadlines. Participants explained that it was not an option to miss a deadline in an email from regional or district upper management. Ensuring that those deadlines were met in conjunction with the completion of their other duties often contributed to long working hours. Compared to their previous role, only one participant was expected to meet such deadlines from regional and district upper management.
Responsibilities related to school principal

While all participants previously had a principal as their supervisor when they were teachers, they did not directly report to the principal. As a teacher, their most frequent interactions with a school administrator were with the AP at their school. Most participants who were academic coaches also collaborated more with the AP than the principal in their role as in academic coach. Participants who were curriculum support specialists worked primarily with middle managers who held district positions equivalent to that of a school AP. Understandably, most participants expressed challenges transitioning from little contact with the principal to reporting directly to the principal.

Participants managed the scope and importance of their new roles by reaching out to other APs for support, reading manuals, working additional hours, and attempting to organize their time and tasks. Most participants indicated a strong desire to do well and successfully fulfill the responsibility they felt to their principal. Some participants also noted that anything negative occurring at the school site was ultimately viewed by upper management as the responsibility of the principal. The novice APs did not want to make mistakes that would have negative repercussions for their principal.

Responsibilities related to parents

All participants previously had frequent interactions with parents when they were teachers. However, participants explained that the responsibility they held related to parents is very different as an AP than when they were teachers. Normally, parents and teacher meet to discuss concerns, reach resolutions, and plan steps towards academic progress of the student. However, if there is an extreme situation, the parent concern
usually reaches the level of the AP. APs are responsible for helping parents with extraordinary circumstances as well as meeting with parents who are displaying challenging behaviors towards teachers or the school. It is the responsibility of the AP to deescalate a situation, locate resources, explain procedures and rationales in a nonconfrontational manner, and help shift a combative conversation to maintain a focus on what is in the best interest of a student. Participants described being surprised by the level of anger shown by parents during meetings, the quickness with which parents got angry, and the frequency with which they encountered extreme situations involving parents as APs compared to when they were teachers. Participants explained that they had to develop new strategies for how to talk to irate parents as well as ensuring their responses to parents’ questions were accurate and could be supported by written district policies.

**Responsibilities related to teachers**

Most participants were previously working in teacher leadership positions such as academic coaches or curriculum support specialists. Those positions entail different responsibilities than teaching but are still a part of the teacher rank in the school system. The transition issue expressed by participants related to teachers was their new responsibility for completing annual teacher evaluations. While many participants held previous experience observing teachers deliver instruction and providing support to help teachers refine their teaching strategies, none of the participants had experience evaluating a teacher. Participants expressed confidence related to the identification of successful instruction and sharing instructional strategies. They expressed feelings of
discomfort related to the responsibility of providing a formal evaluation that could affect the future career of a teacher. As an academic coach or curriculum support specialist, their job was to support teachers. As an AP, additional to that support is the evaluative component that participants expressed as one that was challenging for them emotionally.

**Responsibilities related to students**

Participants experienced transition issues related to students’ emotional struggles and physical safety. As teachers, participants worked with many students. However, like the scenario with parents, if a situation with a student was extreme it usually became the responsibility of the AP, often in conjunction with the school counselor, the school resource officer, and/or the school police. The participants explained how serious student struggles can be, particularly concerning students who talked about suicide or harming themselves. The novice APs acknowledged the importance of making the ‘right’ choices at the ‘right’ time and the potentially serious consequences if they made a mistake along the way. These choices and decisions weighed heavily on the novice APs, and they explained that working with students as an AP was very different than working with students as a teacher.

Further exacerbating their transition into working with the neediest students in the school was the context in which the participants worked. The novice administrators in this study work in an urban setting where poverty is more prevalent, lack of prenatal care can lead to complications during the school years, and students’ home challenges can lead to other issues such as attendance problems, physical and sexual abuse, violent behavior, and substance abuse (Dolph, 2017). The theme of extreme student needs was
one that was mentioned by participants throughout the interviews and could have been partly attributable to the context of the urban environment in which they work.

Participants also explained other issues related to their new role with students. They mentioned that students with asthma attacks, injuries, allergic reactions, and other potentially dangerous health situations were brought to the AP for medical attention and to decide how to proceed. Participants explained that, as a teacher, if a student was potentially in danger, they took them to the AP. Participants acknowledged that as APs they are now expected to react in a calm manner and quickly make a decision that will safeguard the life of the student. Participants acknowledged the importance of their role as a guardian of students’ health and safety and the challenges in the urgency of situations they face as administrators.

*Secondary Research Question 2: To what extent do formal programs support the transition of novice assistant principals?*

The following formal programs were provided to novice APs: (a) BENCH Program, (b) AP Induction Program, (c) monthly AP meetings, and (d) Instructional Rounds. The BENCH Program was an optional program that required an application and an interview. Six participants participated in the BENCH program. AP Induction was provided only to novice APs and participation was required for all first-year APs. Monthly AP meetings and Instructional Rounds were provided to all APs and participation was mandatory. The pros and cons of each program will be discussed.
BENCH program

All participants who participated in the BENCH program said that it was a valuable learning opportunity for them, and they felt that they were more prepared for the role of AP than if they had not participated in the program. Specific aspects of the program that participants felt were most beneficial were the scenarios with role-play components and the internship. At each monthly meeting, scenarios related to the topic of discussion were presented. Participants were asked to role-play to demonstrate how they would respond to a specific situation. Participants said they appreciated this component of the program and that they encountered some of the scenarios when they became APs. They said they felt prepared because they had already reviewed the procedure and practiced enacting a professional response. Participants also said that the internship, in which they conducted a one-week job shadow with an experienced AP, was a strong component of the program. They said that it helped them to understand the daily expectations of APs and observe how certain situations were approached by the experienced APs. Some participants said that the internship was so beneficial to them that they felt another week would have made it an even more valuable experience. A component of the program that was not viewed as being as valuable was the assignments they were asked to complete in between each meeting. Each month BENCH participants were asked to complete an activity that demonstrated their competence with a leadership standard. Participants did not feel as positively about this program component as they did the scenarios and the internship. However, all participants indicated that the program was a good use of their time.
**AP induction program**

Participants described very supportive, positive experiences with the AP induction program. The novice APs said that a strength of the program was the relevance of the topics to their tasks as APs. Additionally, participants appreciated that the topics were presented by experts on that topic from across the school district. The presenters shared their contact information at the end of the meeting, which the novice APs found to be particularly helpful. The participants also expressed appreciating the opportunity to talk to other novice APs. It provided them a sense of comfort in knowing that they were not alone in the challenges they were facing. The meetings also provided the opportunity to build relationships with other APs that they felt could be beneficial as they each learned more elements of their new role. They felt that they were building a network of colleagues that they could turn to later if they had any questions. None of the participants indicated any disadvantages to the program. The only suggestion for improvement was that the program be extended from one-year to two-years for continued support.

**Monthly AP meetings**

While monthly AP meetings were required for all APs, novice APs still experienced these meetings as a positive form of formal support. They appreciated the opportunity to participate in meetings with other experienced APs. They used that opportunity to ask questions and build relationships with colleagues. They also felt that the meetings were valuable because the meetings provided the APs with important information from regional and district staff related to new policies and procedures, changes to policies and procedures, and details regarding upcoming events and deadlines.
Instructional rounds

Instructional rounds were an opportunity for APs to meet at a school to observe teachers and practice completing formal teacher evaluations. Although all APs participate in Instructional Rounds, they were only mentioned by two participants as a source of formal support. Both participants mentioned the value in working with colleagues and learning from one another. They also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn how to complete formal teacher evaluations and ensure that their evaluation ratings were accurate and in alignment with the guidelines provided by the school district.

Importantly, no participants indicated that any of the formal support programs or meetings were an unproductive use of their time. Literature indicates that many school leader support programs have had a common downfall: busy participants felt that their time could have been better spent at work, checking items off their growing to-do lists (Bloom et al., 2005; Enomoto, 2012). That does not appear to be the case in this school district. Many participants highlighted the most beneficial aspects of each program, and a few made suggestions to increase the duration of certain programs, such as the BENCH internship and the AP Induction Program, but no one denounced the importance of what they learned and experienced during the formal programs provided by the school district. This contrasts with findings by Turnbull et al. (2013) in which the novice APs felt that their support programs were an afterthought and not well planned for the particular needs of novice APs. Kottkamp and Rusch (2009) compared research on leadership preparation and support to “a lot of islands sprinkled across a vast sea” (p. 80). It is unclear if this school district is one of those fortunate islands, or if AP induction programs are getting
the attention that has been called for in the research. It is possible that due to the size of this school district, and the relatively high number of APs and novice APs, school district leaders realized the potential return on investment by providing formal support to these novice leaders during their transitional period.

*Secondary Research Question 3: How do novice assistant principals experience informal support?*

The participants experienced informal support as stemming primarily from other APs, both novice and experienced, and their school principal. When seeking informal support, all the APs in the study indicated that they reached out to their AP colleagues when they needed guidance, resources, direction, or advice. Some of the participants knew other APs from their previous positions as an academic coach, a lead teacher, or a curriculum support specialist. However, other times that APs reached out to an AP colleague, it was to someone that they met at one of the school district’s formal programs or meetings. Participants expressed having developed a cadre of other novice APs who possessed areas of expertise different than their own, and they contacted those APs in times of need. Participants depicted a process of sharing knowledge, experiences, and resources.

The other frequent informal support experienced by novice APs came from their building principal. Many participants described a relationship with their supervisor that was supportive and had traits of a mentor/mentee relationship. One AP and principal rode together to visit students’ homes in the evening if they were frequently absent from school. Another AP explained that if there was a large school project that needed to be
completed, she and the principal stayed at work to complete it together. However, two participants did not seem to share that feeling of support. One participant indicated that his principal’s concern over completing deadlines early and frequent monitoring of his progress was a challenge for him. Another participant did not explicitly say that she had challenges working with her principal, but she provided multiple responses that were focused on conflict avoidance, making it seem likely that the principal-AP relationship was not one of support. However, most participants indicated a supportive relationship with their school principal and described their supervisor as a source of knowledge and guidance.

Social networks and social capital are applicable to how novice APs in this study described their experiences of informal support from other APs and their school principal. A social network is, “a set of people or groups of people, ‘actors’ . . . with some pattern of interaction or ‘ties’ between them” (Hatala, 2006, p. 50). Social capital is often described as the resources obtained from relationships among members of social groups and the value of those resources (Burt, 2000). Included in social capital are notions such as relationships, networks, and trust (Adler & Kwon, 2002). The impact of social networks and the quality of relationships can have a vital impact on the integration of newcomers into an organization (Korte & Lin, 2013). The integration of newcomers is important because newcomers need information, skills, knowledge, and other key assets that can be obtained during the socialization process (Korte, 2009). All participants described relationships with other APs that were supportive, respectful, and inclusive. The novice APs portrayed an empathetic environment where experienced APs welcomed
the newcomers into the administrative group. Participants explained that other APs supported them informally by sharing resources, problem solving collaboratively, answering questions, and providing advice. The novice APs were welcomed into the preexisting administrative social network by other APs and were granted access to necessary social capital in the form of key information, skills, and knowledge.

Most participants also described situations where positive relationships were built with their school principals and the school principals shared valuable resources with the novice APs. School principals explained procedures, provided information, collaborated with novice APs on large projects, and provided guidance on navigating the administrative role. Most participants were informally welcomed into the preexisting network of school administrators and granted access to the social capital of the group by their building principal. However, one participant may not have been accepted as a member of the administrative social network by her school principal. Betty did not describe a positive relationship with her principal and did not describe experiences of shared social capital or informal support.

Secondary Research Question 4: How do novice assistant principals experience support on a day-to-day basis?

Novice APs experienced support on a day-to-day basis by seeking informal support from their social networks of other school administrators and accessing knowledge from formal support programs. Participants encountered challenges daily in their new role, and they overcame those challenges by utilizing informal and formal support.
The informal support provided by other school administrators was one that was referred to frequently by participants. As participants outlined daily challenges that they encountered, one of their most reliable sources of support was from other school administrators, primarily other APs. Participants shared experiences of frequent phone calls asking colleagues for help with understanding policies, problem-solving, following procedures, and other challenges they encountered on a day-to-day basis. They explained that the support from AP colleagues is one that they used often and is something that they relied upon the most as novice APs.

Knowledge, skills, and strategies obtained by participants during formal programs also provided a base of support for participants on a day-to-day basis. Participants’ engagement in the BENCH preparation program, AP induction program, monthly AP meetings, and instructional rounds provided skills and knowledge that would form a basis of support that participants could refer to on a day-to-day basis. Those programs were led by staff that shared their contact information with participants and invited the APs to contact them with any questions they may have. The AP induction program also invited staff from other departments to present information to novice APs. Their contact information was shared as well, thus providing another avenue of support for the APs to use as they encountered challenges and had questions.

While some literature states that novice APs are not receiving the support they need (Armstrong, 2010; Fusarelli et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2017), the findings from this study indicate that the school district in which this research was conducted may be on
the right path towards proper AP support. Participants shared experiences of formal support they received that has been beneficial to their day-to-day work as APs.

*Primary Question: How do novice assistant principals experience support as they transition into their new administrative role?*

Novice assistant principals experienced support as a combination of formal support programs provided by the school district in which they work and informal support via a social network of APs and their related social capital. While participants acknowledged the benefits of participation in multiple formal support programs, many of which were designed specifically to meet the needs of aspiring and novice APs, participants shared far more experiences related to how their informal networks of support supported them during the transition into their new administrative role. Novice APs were accepted into the preexisting social network of experienced APs and were granted access to the social capital of the group. Other APs provided the novices with the information and resources they needed to try and meet the demands of their new role. The formal and informal support helped participants cope with their most common challenges including the volume of work and working hours, students’ emotional struggles, the pressures of being a supervisor, task prioritization, the number of duties and the frequency of new tasks to learn.

The support needs expressed in the experiences of the novice APs were reminiscent of Hill’s (2019) description of the process of becoming a manager. Hill (2019) observed and interviewed 19 first-time managers for a year to explore the challenges they faced and to document pivotal transition of going from an individual
contributor to a competent manager. Her research found that new managers were surprised that their new role was more demanding than anticipated and the skills they utilized as an independent worker were different than those required of them as a manager (Hill, 2019). Participants in this study noted that while some of the skills they developed as individual contributors who engaged in a process of deliberate preparation aided them as first-time managers, they still encountered many challenges that were different from or more extreme than the challenges they encountered as teachers, academic coaches, and curriculum support specialists. Students’ emotional and health challenges were more serious and more numerous, the scope of tasks was broader, tasks were often more urgent, and parent conferences involved situations that were often intense and emotionally charged.

Hill (2019) found that the new managers who had a more varied and extensive network for informal support, and who were willing to seek assistance, had an easier time coping with many of the challenges they faced as new managers. Participants in this study worked deliberately to build their social network of other APs and were willing to seek their assistance when they faced challenges. While participants in this study utilized elements of the formal support programs provided by the school district, an informal support network, consisting primarily of other APs, and its’ related social capital, was the most mentioned support that novice APs experienced as they transitioned into their administrative role.
Implications for Practice

In this study, the process of deliberate preparation of APs supported the novice APs in the following ways: The leadership roles inside the school setting, such as test chairperson, EESAC chairperson, and lead teacher, allowed them to learn how to view situations through a broad lens that focused on school-wide goals and needs rather than a classroom-centered focus. Academic coach positions gave aspiring APs the opportunity to practice aspects of instructional leadership including data monitoring, planning interventions, and supporting teachers. Those instructional tasks then served as a source of strength and confidence amidst the many challenges faced during the early years as a school administrator. Many teacher leadership positions within the school site also allowed participants the chance to work collaboratively with current administrators, which could lead to a clearer understanding of what the role of AP entails. Research points to principals as a key factor in supporting a school culture conducive to teacher leadership opportunities (Nguyen et al., 2019). If school district leaders help principals to see the benefits of providing leadership opportunities to teachers, particularly aspiring administrators, it can be valuable to the principal, the school, and the future school administrators.

The teacher leadership positions that participants held outside the school setting, such as curriculum support specialist, helped them grow a social network that later served as valuable social capital that could be called upon for support once the AP position was earned. Efforts made by HRD professionals to maintain and/or grow teacher leadership positions that are outside the school site provide key leadership experience for aspiring
administrators and help to grow the pool of experienced candidates for future administrative positions.

The findings related to challenges that novice APs experienced as they transitioned into their new role (i.e., volume of work, hours working, prioritizing tasks, number of duties, pressure of being a supervisor, students’ emotional struggles) cannot be erased. However, with proper support they can conceivably be decreased. Mentoring has become one way that many school districts choose to support aspiring and current school leaders (Marshall & Davidson, 2016). Mentors can help novice APs learn how to communicate clearly, make effective decisions, perform new tasks, build positive relationships with teachers, and manage time wisely. Mentors can share specific suggestions such as always keeping the best interest of students in the forefront, returning calls and emails promptly, and documenting certain types of incidences in writing (Barnett et al., 2017). Because novice APs face so many challenges and unknown situations, it is important that they have a more experienced school administrator to whom they can turn for support and guidance.

The findings of this study support the claim that novice APs need access to a formal support program designed specifically to meet the needs of new APs (Armstrong, 2012). Participants in this study shared many positive experiences related to the formal support programs provided by their school district. All participants were part of an induction program that was designed specifically for novice APs and was separate from an induction program for novice principals. Participants explained how the induction program supported their learning curve as new APs, offered pertinent information, and
provided a sense of comfort when other novice APs shared their struggles. Many participants were also a part of the BENCH preparation program for aspiring administrators. While it was not as widely praised by participants, it did appear to help the future administrators gain a clearer understanding of the daily tasks of APs and all participants in the BENCH program indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to participate in the week-long internship. The instructional rounds were also mentioned by participants as a way to gain practical experience and confidence regarding evaluating and supporting teachers. Participants valued their formal support opportunities and other school districts could benefit from offering a support-model similar to the one provided by this school district.

The findings from this study confirm the preference of novice APs to seek support from a social network of familiar, trusted school administrators (Barnett et al., 2017). Actively working to create a CoP (Wenger, 1998) could help to grow the informal support network that exists between school administrators. Wenger’s (1998) CoP consists of a group of people that share a common interest and meet regularly to learn from each other’s experiences and grow together (Lave & Wenger, 1991). By focusing on creating a community of practice within their school administrator groups, a school district could foster those problem-solving interactions and provide novices with access to experts. There are numerous cost-effective ways that school district leaders can create a CoP to foster the relationships between their school administrators. Monthly meeting agendas can be designed to ensure they always begin with an opportunity for APs to interact with one another. One example would be to start each meeting with a protocol from the
National School Reform Faculty (NSRF). Protocols are designed to be an icebreaker that encourages active listening, silent reflection, equity, parity, appreciation for differing perspectives. They are also intended to create safe environments where participants feel comfortable asking difficult questions, able to give and receive honest feedback, and leave feeling optimistic, empowered and in possession of actionable next steps (National School Reform Faculty, 2021).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The school district in which this study took place has a formal, comprehensive AP support system. It has a structured preparation program designed specifically for aspiring APs, an induction program that provides relevant information and opportunities to practice new skills, and continuing support for all APs in the form of instructional rounds and monthly AP meetings. A recommendation for future research is to conduct a longitudinal study in a school district that has a strong, established formal support program for novice APs, and in a school district that does not have a formal support program for novice APs. The research could use quantitative methods to compare the retention or attrition of novice APs over a 5-year period in each of the school districts. The study could also use student scores on standardized assessments and leadership evaluations of the APs to search for causal relationships between effective administrators, student test scores, and/or support programs for APs. If there is a positive correlation between AP’s retention and formal support programs, AP leadership evaluations and student test scores, or AP leadership evaluations and formal support programs, it could make a strong case for allocating funding to formal AP support programs.
The results of this research indicate a keen orientation of novice APs to rely on informal support networks of other administrators. Future research could be conducted to get a better understanding of who novice APs turn to for support and how they met those individuals. A social network analysis (SNA) could be conducted to understand the relationships between administrators. A survey could use name generator questions asking participants to identify the five administrators they rely on most when they need guidance, and to rate the level of support that person provides (Han et al., 2019). Follow-up questions could ask for a brief description of how they met that person, the degree of trust they feel with that person, and a short description of why they turn to that person for support and in what situations. The results would lead to a more complete understanding of how informal support networks are formed with school administrators and could provide guidance on how school districts can help strengthen that network.

Participants reported that they engaged in deliberate preparation for the AP role and shared many stories related to how those experiences supported them as novice APs. Some questions raised by those results are: (a) What teacher leadership role or position was most impactful? (b) How did they get involved with that teacher leadership role or position? (c) To what extent did each facet of the role or position help them prepare to be an AP? and (d) Considering that many participants held multiple leadership roles or positions, how would participants rank those roles in order of most to least helpful in preparing for the AP role? A mixed-methods approach could be used to respond to these questions and glean insight into specific teacher leadership roles that have the greatest impact on supporting novice APs.
Limitations of the Study

The findings of this phenomenological study should be considered in the context of potential limitations. This research used qualitative interviews of ten participants, lasting an average of 42 minutes. It is possible that longer interviews could have yielded more data. Another potential limitation is that the research was conducted in a large, urban school district. Findings may not be transferable to a different context such as small school district or a rural school district. Additionally, these participants were provided with a variety of formal support programs designed specifically to meet the professional development needs of novice APs. It is possible that the experiences of these participants would be different than experiences of novice APs that did not have access to formal preparation and support programs.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how novice assistant principals experience support as they transition into their new administrative role. Specifically, this study aimed to uncover experiences related to formal and informal support. This research was necessary because APs are involved ubiquitously in daily school operations. There was a scarcity of research on how these important leaders in education can be supported, and this study was the researcher’s attempt to begin filling that gap in knowledge.

Five themes emerged from the data collected through interviews with the participants. The themes are deliberate preparation, challenges, coping strategies, support
mechanisms, and personal attributes. Schlossberg’s transition theory provided key insights into how novice APs experienced their transition into administration.

The study provided implications for school district leaders, human resource development professionals, and educational leadership researchers. The study also provided recommendations for future research that could extend the findings from this study.
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150


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LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participant Demographics</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Administration Context of Novice APs</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Position Held Immediately Before Becoming an AP</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Derivation of Interview Guide Questions</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teacher Leadership Responsibilities Prior to AP Position</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Preparatory Roles Outside the School Setting Prior to AP Position</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Commonly Mentioned Challenges of the New Role</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Sources of Informal Support</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Describe the positions you held before you became an assistant principal.

2. Describe your experience as an assistant principal.

3. What factors influenced your decision to become an assistant principal.

4. Please describe a typical day as an assistant principal.

5. What are some of the biggest challenges experienced daily?

6. What do you do when you encounter __________ challenge? (reference examples mentioned in previous question)

7. What would you say has helped you most since you became an assistant principal?

8. Describe any programs you participate in, or have participated in, and how they helped you as an assistant principal.

9. Describe any strategies you use to manage the workload.

10. What do you do when you feel emotionally exhausted at work?

11. Tell me about your work-life balance.

12. How does your current role as an assistant principal compare to your previous role?

13. What advice would you give to someone starting out as an assistant principal?

14. What do you want people you work with to know about being an assistant principal?
Appendix B

Consent to Participate

1. The Novice Assistant Principal: Support Needs in the Transition to the Administrative Role

SUMMARY INFORMATION
Things you should know about this study:

- Purpose: The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of Assistant Principals regarding the support they receive in their job during the first three years.
- Procedures: If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an initial online interview (via Zoom) and a follow-up online interview.
- Duration: The initial online interview will take about an hour. The follow-up online interview will take about 30 minutes.
- Risks: The main risk or discomfort from this research is participants may feel uncomfortable sharing information about their job that might be linked back to them. To reduce this likelihood, each participant will be given a copy of their transcript to review prior to publication of the results so they may decide whether some information needs to be redacted to protect their confidentiality.
- Benefits: Those reading the research may gain a better understanding of the experience of being a new assistant principal.
- Alternatives: If you prefer to have a telephone interview, that is an option.
- Participation: Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please carefully read the entire document before agreeing to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of Assistant Principals in their first year to inform the development of induction programs that meet their needs.

NUMBER OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS
If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of 20 people in this research study.

DURATION OF THE STUDY
Your participation will involve a one hour online interview and a 30-minute follow-up interview.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to do the following things:
1. Provide an online interview date and time.
2. Share stories in response to questions asked by the researcher.
3. All online interviews will be audio-recorded for later transcription.

RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS
The study has the following possible risks to you: The main risk or discomfort from this research is participants may feel uncomfortable sharing information about their job that might be linked back to them. To reduce this likelihood, each participant will be given a copy of their transcript to review prior to publication of the results so
they may decide whether some information needs to be redacted to protect their confidentiality.

**BENEFITS**
Those reading the research may gain a better understanding of the experience of being a new assistant principal. Your experiences will inform future induction programs for Assistant Principals, thus contributing to the effectiveness of this career field.

**ALTERNATIVES**
If you prefer to participate by telephone rather than in an online interview, please indicate that.

[ ] CONFIDENTIALITY

* 2. The records of this study will be kept private and will be protected to the fullest extent provided by law. In any sort of report that we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher team will have access to the records. However, your records may be inspected by authorized University or other agents who will also keep the information confidential.

**COMPENSATION & COSTS**
There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

**RIGHT TODECLINE OR WITHDRAW**
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to participate in the study or withdraw your consent at any time during the study. You will not lose any benefits if you decide not to participate or if you quit the study early. The investigator reserves the right to remove you without your consent at such time that he/she feels it is in the best interest.

**RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION**
If you have any questions about the purpose, procedures, or any other issues relating to this research study you may contact Dr. Peter J. Cistone, 11200 SE 8th Street, CASE 450 Miami, FL 33199, 305-348-2665.

**IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**
If you would like to talk with someone about your rights of being a subject in this research study or about ethical issues with this research study, you may contact the FIU Office of Research Integrity by phone at 305-348-2494 or by email at ori.fiu.edu.

[ ] PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

* 3. By clicking below, I indicate that I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study. I have had a chance to ask any questions about this study, and they have been answered for me. I understand that I may be given a copy of this form for my records upon request.

[ ] I Consent
* 4. What is your first name?

* 5. What is your last name?

* 6. Preferred email address to send Zoom online interview link?

7. Best phone number to if there are challenges with the online interview?

* 8. What is your ethnic identity?

* 9. What is your gender identity

* 10. What age range are you a part of?
   - [ ] 21-30
   - [ ] 31-40
   - [ ] 41-50
   - [ ] 51-60

* 11. What school type are you part of?
   - [ ] Elementary
   - [ ] Middle
   - [ ] K-8
   - [ ] High
   - [ ] Alternative
   - [ ] Vocational
   - [ ] Other (please specify)
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