Experiences of Middle School Principals with Accountability-Related Stress and Coping Skills

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EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS WITH ACCOUNTABILITY-RELATED STRESS AND COPING SKILLS

by

Gus T. Calbert

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
Western Michigan University
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Doctoral Committee:

Louann Bierlein Palmer, Ed.D., Chair
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Lewis Walker, Ph.D.
This exploratory qualitative study was focused on the impact of state and federal mandates on the role of middle school principals, specifically what increased responsibilities and major areas of stress middle school principals are experiencing; how any enhanced stress impacts these middle school principals, both professionally and personally; and what coping mechanisms principals use to handle the stress of any increased responsibilities.

The experiences and perceptions of 12 principals from one Midwestern state were captured through semi-structured interviews, and by having them complete Allison’s Coping Preference Scale. Their answers provide a deeper understanding of what it is like leading a middle school in an environment that includes increased accountability and responsibility, student testing, teacher and principal evaluations, stress, and coping skills.

Findings revealed 11 major and minor themes. Nearly all principals have experienced an increase in their responsibilities for implementing federal and state mandates, and associated stress. Specifically, all expressed specific concerns and stress over complying with the logistics of testing mandates, and that their responsibilities have increased related to teacher evaluations, as well as their stress levels. They also reported enhanced stress due to things like accountability-related school labeling, teacher stress with their evaluations, parental communication, and social media issues with students.
These principals revealed that such stress has a negative impact on their personal lives, and that they use a variety of coping strategies daily to relieve stress. Using humor, maintaining a positive attitude, treating stakeholders with humanity, seeking balance, regular exercise, finding quiet time, and talking with family and close friends were all strategies principals frequently used to mitigate stress.

Interestingly, while enhanced teacher and principal evaluations as connected to student outcomes are now a major part of their role, principals reported that such teacher evaluations are so much better than past evaluation efforts. In addition, most voiced no real increased responsibilities or stress associated with principal evaluations. While they felt some mandate streamlining related to such evaluations is needed, such mandates are helping to improve educational outcomes.

This study confirmed, as noted in previous research literature, that the principal profession in this country is indeed a very stressful and difficult one. It contributes to the scarce literature on the accountability-related responsibilities and associated stress of principals in the middle school environment; and it provides a fuller understanding of how principals perceive their work environment as related to state and federal mandates regarding student testing, teacher evaluations, and principal evaluations. It also informs the reader about the stresses that principals are under and some of their stressors; knowing how they handled such stress is important, as well as instructive. Recommendations for leaders and future research are offered.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I pray to God and say thank you to my ancestors for having an indomitable spirit and the intestinal fortitude to live inspirational lives. I am eternally grateful to my parents, Earnest (E.C.) and Alline Calbert, for teaching me how to read and write, and instilling in me a love of learning.

With that being said, I would like to thank those individuals who participated in the pilot study and the actual study. Without their participation the completion of this dissertation would not have been possible.

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Finally, to my wife, Ann, without your love, belief in me, and support none of this would have been possible. To my children, William, Aliah, and Lawrence, your undying love and support have been a driving force in my life. It is my hope that
achieving this goal will serve as an example to you that all things are possible through believing in God, hard work and persistence. Also, I am hopeful that all of my grandchildren, Marquan, Jabari, Malaya, and Tate will be inspired by my achievements to reach their dreams.

Gus T. Calbert
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Year after year, reports reveal that the United States continues to lag behind many countries in education. On October 8, 2013, during NBC’s fourth-annual Education Nation Summit on the state of education in America, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan reflected "We have a real state of crisis… We can't just invest in the status quo, we have to invest in a vision of reform." Duncan’s call for an investment in a vision of reform has been reflected in various mandates at the federal and state levels.

Indeed, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) fundamentally changed the landscape of education for all U.S. public schools (Suber, 2011). This important piece of legislation led to dramatic changes in the role of the school principal (DeLeon, 2006; Queen & Queen, 2005). Many of these changes were fueled by the mandates for improved student outcomes associated with the law (Lasswell, Pace, & Reed, 2008). In the state of Michigan, these mandates were bolstered by Public Act (PA) 102 of 2011, which required the use of data on student growth as a primary factor in the evaluation of a teacher's or school administrator's job performance. With this new evaluation system, the role of the school principal shifted from a primary focus on how money and other resources were managed to a role that was characterized by high stakes professional and personal accountability for student achievement, thus, placing the position under intense examination. In short, the role of the school principal was characterized by high stakes professional and personal accountability for student achievement, leaving the position subject to intense scrutiny (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2004).
The recent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) 2015 is the newest iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and still contains strong accountability provisions. Indeed, school principals’ duties have become increasingly complex and demanding (Friedman, 2002). Research indicates principals are working longer hours, feeling underappreciated, and experiencing more stress (Daresh, Ganter, Dunlop, & Hvizdek, 2000). In some cases, this stress leads to weight gain, high blood pressure, heart attacks, stroke, burnout, and thoughts of suicide (Queen & Queen, 2005; West, 2010; West & Rettzug, 2008).

Principals working in middle schools face a Cerebus. In Greek mythology a Cerebus is a three headed dog. The three headed dog appears in the form of the US Department of Education, State Department of Education, and Local Education Association. Each institution has its expectations about how the principal should lead the school. This is juxtaposed with the principal’s expectations of what it is like leading a school under NCLB, RTT and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Yet, while prior studies have examined the general nature of stress in the role of the school principal, few studies have examined how principals experience and cope with the stress associated with recent education reforms, such as those requirements to significantly enhance teacher and principal evaluations. My study helps address this gap in the literature.

Background

There are many difficulties associated with the role of school principal. These include a hectic lifestyle, long hours, intense pressure, a lack of appreciation, and constant conflict resulting from an inability to please all constituencies (Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; Proethoe, 2009). Additionally, school principals must also manage the relatively new and demanding responsibilities associated with education reforms, such as NCLB and, in Michigan,
PA 102 of 2011. In general, the principal’s job is stressful, and the degree of stress appears to be increasing over time (Brock & Grady, 2002; Sodoma & Else, 2009; Whitaker & Turner, 2000).

Two factors contribute to stress in the role of the school principal: (a) external pressure for accountability (Yerkes & Guaglione, 1998) and (b) burnout (Maslach, 2003). Maslach (2003) described burnout as a psychological syndrome that involves an extended response to stressors in the workplace. The three core components of burnout are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (pp. 189-192). Although living everyday involves managing some stress as a common life experience, living with excessive, unmanaged stress leads to a variety of physical and mental health problems. Beyond psychological factors, such as burnout, individuals exposed to high levels of ongoing stress also suffer damage to cells, tissues, and organs (Colbert, 2008; Sapolsky, 2005; Weil, 2005; Wheeler, 2007).

Given their high levels of stress, coping strategies are an important component in the range of a school principal’s skills. Aldwin and Yancura (2004) described coping strategies as rational or irrational thoughts one makes to control emotional responses to stressful situations. In other words, coping strategies may be healthy or unhealthy choices depending on an individual’s response to an external stimulus.

As noted, many school principals’ difficulties with stress and coping were heightened when NCLB first was enacted. Under NCLB, each child, regardless of ability or proficiency, whether they have a disability or recently immigrated to the United States and are English language learners, were expected to be proficient in every subject (Hursh, 2007). In the summer of 2012, the Michigan Department of Education applied for a flexibility waiver from the U.S. Department of Education, which provided some relief from NCLB by permitting time to
redesign the state’s education system. Accordingly, NCLB’s adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements were incorporated into the Michigan School Accountability Scorecards. While some flexibility was granted, additional levels of responsibility were also added. This new state accountability system has also contributed to increased anxiety for principals and teachers by connecting teacher and principal appraisals to student achievement (Zubrzycki, 2013).

Under the current state law, a teacher’s or school administrator’s annual evaluation effectiveness rating is now used to make decisions regarding promotion, retention, and certification. Stress and coping related to such state and federal reforms are further elaborated on in my conceptual framework section. As stated, my study examines this link and explores how principals are coping with these added pressures.

**Problem Statement**

Some principals are leaving the profession early, while others are retiring at rates higher than ever before (NASSP, 2009; School Leaders Network, 2014). Twenty-five thousand, or one-quarter of our nation’s principals, leave the profession each year, and 50% of principals quit within the first three years (School Leaders Network, 2014). This alarming trend has a negative effect on the lives of students.

The problems with retention in the profession may be related to the stress associated with changing complex and demanding job duties. A MetLife 2012 survey of principals found that 84% of principals reported high stress levels two or more days per week as related to the complexity of the job, and limited ability to make important decisions, coupled with pressure to raise student achievement. Furthermore, the Metlife findings give credence to the National Association of Elementary School Principals’ (2005) research, which identified workload, long
hours, physical and mental fatigue, lack of clarity in handling conflict with state and federal mandates, and job isolation, as reasons for leaving the principal’s position.

While principals are still heavily engaged in traditional duties, such as managing resources and safety, they are also becoming more heavily involved in developing school-community partnerships and facilitating student learning (Cooley & Shen, 2003). Moreover, as an extension of their daily job requirements, principals are required to supervise, evaluate, document, and improve the quality of their staff’s teaching performance, all while holding teachers accountable for their work. Simultaneously, principals are themselves being evaluated and held accountable for the academic achievement of their students, and by extension, the work of their teachers as a whole (Knapp & Feldman, 2011).

Education’s literature base is robust with research and conceptual articles on the challenging nature of the principal position (e.g., Bottoms & O’neill, 2001; Colbert, 2008; Combs, Edmonson, & Jackson, 2009; Cuban, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Sapolsky, 2005). In Michigan, NCLB, PA102 (2011) and PA 173 (2015), have all contributed to increased stress for principals. In addition, PA 173 built on the provisions in PA 102 (2011), which eliminated the promotion and reduction of teachers and administrators based on seniority and required student growth to be factored in as part of a teachers’ or school administrators’ evaluation. PA 173 also provided guidelines on how much student growth and achievement are to be used in evaluations.

According to Public Acts 173, signed by Governor Rick Snyder November 5, 2015:

Under current law, Section 1249 (1) Subject to subsection (4) with the involvement of teachers and school administrators, the board of a school district or intermediate school district or board of directors of a public school academy shall adopt and implement for all teachers and administrators a rigorous,
transparent, and fair performance evaluation system that does all of the following: (2a) the performance evaluation system shall include at least an annual year end evaluation for all teachers. Beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, an annual year end evaluation shall meet all of the following: (i) for the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 school years, 25% of the year end evaluation shall be based on student growth and assessment data. Beginning in 2018-2019 school year, 40% of the annual year end evaluation shall be based on student growth data and assessment data. (ii) Beginning 2018-2019 school year, for the core content areas in grades and subjects in which state assessments are administered 50% of student growth must be measured using the state assessment. (p. 2)

The increasing emphasis placed on student achievement data, coupled with the personal and professional implications associated with that data, places school principals at great risk for stress leading to burnout and premature exit from the profession (Bottoms & Oneill, 2001; Colbert, 2008; Combs et al., 2009; Cuban, 2004; Fenwick, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Sapolsky, 2005). Yet, few studies had examined how principals experience and cope with such stress, especially the stress associated with recent education reforms.

**Purpose of the Study**

There is a paucity of literature concerning how principals are handling increased responsibilities and pressures from accountability mandates associated with various education reforms. Specifically, there were no studies that examined the issues covered in my study, namely: (a) how these pressures affect principals’ work-related responsibilities and relationships with their staff, (b) how these pressures affect principals personally; and (c) how principals cope
with the stress associated with these pressures, especially the changes principals are making in their leadership styles or buildings.

Therefore, these issues were examined through the lens of middle school principals, with a focus on capturing their voices. It is from the unique perspectives of principals leading these schools, that the findings of this study were constructed.

**Research Questions**

The overarching question of this study looked at how Michigan middle school principals are handling increasing job responsibilities and pressures as they work in an era of high-stakes accountability. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research sub-questions:

1. In an era of enhanced accountability, what increased responsibilities and major pressures are principals experiencing, in reference to:
   (a) teacher evaluations; and
   (b) principal evaluations and expectations?

2. How are principals handling the increased responsibilities and pressures, in particular:
   (a) how does stress from increased accountability affect principals professionally; and
   (b) how does stress from increased accountability affect principals personally?

3. Subsequently, what coping mechanisms do principals use to handle the stress of these increased responsibilities and major pressures?

**Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 illustrates my study’s conceptual framework, depicting a view from the perspective of the principal. As an overview, the first box lists various factors associated with working in an era of high stakes teacher/school administrator accountability. The second box is principal leadership, where as the principal interacts with various stakeholders affects how he or
she reacts to stress, strain and stressors in the workplace. The third box represents what is known about the human response to pressure using Maslach’s (1976) definition of burnout. The fourth box denotes the effect stress has on principals both professionally and personally. Finally, the fifth box represents coping mechanisms principals put in place to handle stress.

![Conceptual framework diagram]

**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework.

As shown in Figure 1, the principal is the focus in this study. Traditionally, the school principal was likened to a shop foreman (Schlechty, 2009). Teachers were seen as skilled workers, and students in turn were viewed as raw material and product. In our contemporary era, principals are perceived more as instructional leaders rather than foremen or managers. As an instructional leader, the principal’s primary duties include completing certain tasks, such as teacher evaluations, school improvement, providing parents and students with feedback, and being responsive to the community.

Principal leadership consists of many unique factors when considered within the context of education reform, including professional and personal accountability. Because of recent Michigan laws, all school buildings must have a functioning school improvement team and satisfy school performance indicators. These performance indicators were used to evaluate teacher and school administrator performance, leading to retention, promotion, and termination (Hinchey, 2010; Zepeda, 2007). For many school principals, the pressure of having to collect
student achievement data, and then be evaluated on that data, leads to added stress in an already demanding job position (Glazerman et al., 2010).

Nationwide there are approximately 3.5 million teachers and 95,000 principals who were affected by new evaluation systems (Zubrzycki, 2013). Many of these systems utilize value-added models, which evaluate teacher effectiveness according to student tests scores by determining how teachers contribute to student growth over time. In general, the value-added portion of a teacher or principal’s evaluation ranges from 35% to 50% of their total composite score (Flannary, 2013). The position of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) is that assigning 40% or more of a principal’s evaluation to student achievement is too stringent (Flannary, 2013). Michigan’s student growth requirements were viewed by some as overly strict and are likely to create increased stress for the school principals required to implement the new mandates.

In addition to the student growth requirements associated with PA 102 of 2011 and PA173 of 2015, the Michigan School Accountability Scorecard includes sanctions for schools with significant numbers of students who fail to pass mandatory examinations. NCLB had originally required 85% of students attending public schools to pass state mandated reading and mathematics tests by the 2021-2022 school year. With such increasing mandates, the principals’ role was continuing to transition from manager to instructional leader, with an emphasis on principal as teacher evaluator at the forefront (Range, Scherz, Holt, & Young, 2011).

Central to the development of this study is what is known about how humans react to stress, as a concept that has multiple meanings. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (1999) defined stress in the workplace as the harmful physical and emotional
responses that occur when a job’s requirement is misaligned with a worker’s skill set and capabilities. Research has found that prolonged exposure to high levels of pressure, coupled with high levels of stress, has adverse effects on the human body. Three general types or levels of stress are usually identified: systemic or physiological, psychological, and sociocultural. Physiological stress is the body’s potentially harmful reaction to events (Cannon, 1953; Selye, 1976). Psychological stress consists primarily of cognitive and emotional reactions to perceived threat (Lazarus, 1966). Sociocultural stress focuses on disturbance of social systems or social units (Smelser, 1963). Unchecked stress can lead to damage of cells, organs, and tissues, as well as changes in health, diet, sleeping, physical exercise, and socialization habits (Colbert, 2008; Jones & Bright, 2001; Sapolsky, 2005; Wheeler, 2007).

My study explored how stress may have affected middle school principals professionally and personally, and what coping mechanisms they employed to handle such stress. Coping, the final aspect of this study’s conceptual framework has to do with the way people manage life conditions that are stressful. Coping does not necessarily imply a positive outcome (Monat, Lazarus, & Reevy, 2007). Lazarus (1998) defined “coping as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 20).

**Theoretical Framework**

In order to gain a clear picture of the theoretical framework for my study imagines that you are looking at a stool with three legs. The stool serves as a metaphor for middle school principals. The seat represents the principals’ values, character, integrity, and ability to form relationships. The first leg represents patterns and characteristics of social behavior. The second leg is symbolic of how principals see themselves. The third leg represents the expectations of
stakeholders interacting with principals (Biddle, 1986). Although principals have a myopic view of their role and expectations stakeholders may view principals in a different light. This difference in principals and stakeholder’s perception can be explained by examining Biddle's definition of Role Theory. “Thus, role theory may be reflected to concern itself with a triad of concepts: patterned and characteristic social behaviors, parts of identities that are assumed by social participants, and scripts or expectations for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers” (Biddle, 1986, p. 68). Role theory origins can be traced back to theater (Biddle, 1996).

Robert Hooke, a 17th century prominent physicist and biologist, pondered why manmade structures like bridges could not withstand natural disasters like windstorms, floods and tornadoes. He reasoned that the bridges must be designed and constructed differently in order to withstand natural disasters. Hooke’s use of the term “load” referred to external forces such as weight; stress was the area of the bridge’s structure over which the load was applied; and strain was the deformation of the structure produced by the interplay of both load and stress” (Lazarus, 1999, p. 31).

A middle school principal’s daily work schedule, combined with outside forces, school accountability, school reform, federal and state mandates, or “load,” as informed by Hooke’s analogy, helps explain the environment in which middle school principals live and work. “Stress,” the second term used in Hooke’s definition, is the area of the bridge that carries the weight. Upon reflection, middle school principals carry the stress or weight in three areas, the physical self, mental self, and social self. The third area according to Hooke’s definition is “strain,” which is the area that receives deformation because of interaction between load and stress on the structure or human body. A close inspection of middle school principals based on
the literature indicates physically that principals are suffering from high blood pressure, heart attacks, and strokes (Sogunro, 2012), based in part on trying to satisfy federal and state mandates. Moreover, principals report feeling lonely, isolated, and questioning their self-worth based on trying to satisfy stakeholders’ demands (Sogunro, 2012). Finally, some principals are having self-doubts about their ability to perform and are leaving the profession early (Sogunro, 2012). Thus, load, stress, and strain, as used by Hooke, bring clarity to the discussion of middle school principals’ role.

### Methods Overview

This study was conducted using a qualitative, phenomenological approach. “Phenomenological approaches seek to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience: how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 104). Simply put, phenomenology is an approach wherein individuals describe a common lived experience shared by the participants themselves. These descriptions capture the essence of the experience, or the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

“Phenomenology is a method originally formalized in philosophy that has also been employed across the humanities, social sciences, and service professions over the last century. Since the 1960s, phenomenology has clearly defined methods for formulating meaning-oriented, descriptive knowledge in psychology” (Wertz et al., 2011, p. 4). Wertz et al. (2011) noted that the knowledge obtained through a phenomenological approach must be grounded in context with the unique characteristics of its subject matter (p. 53). In this investigation, I purposely selected 12 middle school principals from one Midwestern state as participants. All the participants had
been working as a middle school principal for at least three years. Open-ended questions were used as part of the interview protocol.

**Importance of the Study**

This research contributes to the literature on school principal leadership by providing additional information on how principals are handling accountability mandates, with a specific focus on how principals are managing and coping with stress resulting from increased accountability requirements in one Midwestern state. Findings from this study may assist principals in assessing their situation, planning interventions, and equipping themselves with coping mechanisms. The findings may also help school districts by illuminating areas for professional development and they may help aspiring principals by informing them of the aspects of the job that may cause professional and personal angst. Ultimately, the study’s findings can add to the conversation on how to better prepare principals for a challenging yet rewarding job with increased satisfaction and longevity.

**Chapter I Summary**

This chapter provided background information pertaining to the context of the study and presented the problem statement of this study. It also presented a conceptual framework and a theoretical framework describing the interrelationships among middle school principal leadership and factors such as school accountability requirements, stress, and coping strategies. The objectives of the study and the research questions were highlighted. The significance of the study was discussed, and the key concepts of the study were defined. Next, Chapter II will review relevant literature.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

“No full understanding of the current educational situation in a nation is possible without a knowledge of the evolution of the school system” (Pulliam, 1968, p. 3). For many decades, education in the U.S. was viewed worldwide as a model to be emulated. It had evolved from being an institution that essentially educated white males, the rich, and students in various religious denominations to one that educated students of every race, gender and ethnicity, as well as those children with special needs, the migrants, the poor, and homeless populations.

Additionally, children in the U.S. are educated in a variety of learning environments—public schools, charter schools, private schools, parochial schools, virtual schools, and home schools.

Today, however, our educational institution is no longer viewed with envy by many countries around the world. Thus, the need for school reform has become a common theme in many quarters throughout the country with a focus on the fundamental question: Who will control education and who is education to serve? In their seminal text Social Change, Conflict and Education, Erickson et al. (1972) observed that, in most cases, schools as institutions are composed of internal and external stakeholders and they have expectations regarding the roles and positions held by school administrators, principals, teachers and parents with respect to the education of children. It is important to note that each group of stakeholders—both internal and external—has its own agenda and each is vying for control of the school. Thus, it seems that conflict is inevitable when there is a lack of consensus on how to best educate our children and how that education is to be financed, and more.

There is a plethora of empirical studies, on the rather dismal impact that education has had on children in the United States, especially children in poor, underserved neighborhoods in
urban and rural areas. However, a review of this rich literature falls outside the boundaries of this study. Instead, this chapter provides the reader a context for understanding school reform legislation; the impact reform legislation has had on principals and teachers in several states; and a need to investigate how middle school principals have worked with stress and coping strategies.

**Federal and State Reform Efforts**

A cursory review of No Child Left Behind, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and Race to the Top provide the context for middle school principals work environment. A short review is appropriate given that principals today are managing to lead while operating under three school reform systems. The paragraphs below describe federal and state reform efforts.

The No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) law grew out of concern that the American education system was no longer internationally competitive (Klein, 2012). Nationally, the U.S. education system was operating ineffectively as many students were being marginalized based on equity issues. Locally, many parents rated their school systems performance higher than the state or federal governments (Gallup Poll, 2014). These factors separately would cause principals to be concerned; however, collectively, these issues caused principals to feel under intense physical, mental, social and emotional stress.

NCLB focused on five primary goals: (1) establish standards for the nation, (2) improving academic achievement for all students, (3) increase accountability, (4) establish equity, and (5) transparency. Ultimately, the U.S. Department of Education created a system of school improvement for every state, district, or school under its authority. Additionally, the amount of power, influence, and financial resources shifted to the U.S. Department of Education.
The shift in power caused dissention among the State Department of Education, governors, and the U.S. Congress (Education Week, 2012). States could choose not to comply with the federal mandates at the risk of losing Federal Title 1 money. This combination of factors only angered and incensed the position of States rights supporters opposed to more federal intervention.

In February 2009, Congress approved the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) President Obama’s $787 billion economic stimulus package. The purpose of ARRA was to end the Great recession of 2009 (Congressional Budget Office, 2014) by stimulating the economy, supporting job creation, and investing in critical sectors including infrastructure and education (Executive Summary, 2014). Moreover, it is important to note that the ARRA provided $4.35 billion for the Race to the Top initiative. Race to the Top was a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward states that: (a) created the conditions for education innovation and reform; (b) achieved significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers; and (c) implemented ambitious plans in the following four core education reform areas. The four core areas were as follows:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace, and to compete in the global economy.
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction.
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
• Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (Department of Education, 2009, p. 2)

Incidentally, Michigan was among those states that submitted an application for consideration as a Race to the Top state; however, Michigan’s application was rejected. This denial left Michigan in a precarious position because it anticipated using some of the RTTT federal dollars to help implement some of its educational reform measures.

It is also important to note that; overall, both legislative initiatives, No Child Left Behind and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and Race to the Top, were somewhat controversial. Some critics advance an argument that these initiatives created additional problems for school superintendents, principals, and teachers, with the primary problem residing in the execution of the legislative mandates (Phi Delta Kappan, 2014). Arguably, a tremendous amount of pressure rests directly on the shoulders of these parties, and the pressure to succeed also has profound implications on recruiting and retaining principals and superintendents, who have to work with their staff under intense scrutiny from the public.

It is in this context that Michigan was granted a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education in 2012, regarding replacing the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report cards, required under No Child Left Behind. This waiver set the stage for the creation of a new reporting system on school performance, known as Accountability Scorecards, and it contains five reporting categories, namely:

1. Student participation on a state assessment.

2. Student proficiency on state assessments.

3. Student graduation or attendance rates.

4. Educator effectiveness label reporting teacher/student data link reporting rates; and
5. School Improvement Plan reporting and school diagnostic reporting.

A related matter is the Common Core, which is a set of coordinated skills in English/language arts and mathematics that students at each grade level should have mastered before graduating from high school. The Common Core curriculum was developed by a blue-ribbon panel of various stakeholders’ politicians, members of business, industry, university professors, curriculum experts, and K-12 teachers and administrators. It was originally supported by 46 out of 50 states, including the District of Columbia (Metlife, 2012). It was adopted in Michigan in 2010. That said, Erickson’s et al. (1972) discussion regarding who controls education, and who is it for, remains a relevant issue today because there is disagreement concerning whether the Common Core curriculum will benefit all students. For example, the perception of loss of professional autonomy among teachers coincides with a ground swell of opposition to the Common Core, which was viewed by some as a battle regarding federal and state rights (Bush & Calderon, 2014).

The current federal legislation, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, replaced NCLB in order to reduce the role that the federal government plays in educating children and to give more autonomy to states and local school districts (Education Week, 2015). However, the legislation did not reduce principals’ accountability for how well their students perform on state assessment and other benchmarks. Moreover, the failure of principals to successfully navigate the new terrain, policies, and procedures has resulted in swift and, in certain instances, dire consequences for principals, teachers, and school districts. Thus, the Every Student Succeeds Act, with its new mandates, was perceived as a major challenge for those responsible for the education of children.
It was in this context of school reform that the 2012 Federal School Staffing Survey looked at teachers’ perceptions of instructional practices, homework, and discipline (Education Week, 2015). Local teachers indicated that they had more professional autonomy in 2003 than they did in 2012. Similar results were found in a 2014 Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) poll of teachers and parents who gave their local school district a higher grade than they gave the state or national education system.

Not unlike the teachers, parents are also dissatisfied with the schools. In the same 2014 PDK survey, respondents were asked, “What is the biggest problem public schools in your community must deal with?” Parents responded indicating that school finance, concerns about education standards, lack of discipline, drugs, fighting, gangs, difficulty in getting good teachers, and needing more teachers were the most significant problems in schools.

In summary, regardless of who is in control or who is education for, school principals are under enormous pressure to reform their schools in accordance with the federal and state legislative initiatives. Principals are viewed as the change agents who are primarily responsible for satisfying state superintendents, district superintendents, and governors, while simultaneously addressing the concerns of teachers, students, and parents. Therefore, it is likely that school principals are indeed experiencing more stress than ever, both professionally and personally.

The next section looks at the states of Virginia, Minnesota, and Michigan to get a sense of what previous research has revealed about the impact legislative initiatives have had on the principals’ role in educational institutions.

**Legislative Reform Measures in Select States**

A review of the educational reform movement research revealed that much has changed for principals. Over the past decade, reforms measures have had a negative effect on the stress
levels of school administrators and principals. Some of these reforms include the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the Race to the Top initiative, and the Common Core Standards. Furthermore, many states have initiated their own reform measures—some in order to meet federal mandates and others for their own purposes. Michigan, as discussed earlier, is a state that has recently implemented enhanced state accountability standards. In addition to Michigan, a review of relevant research on the impact of legislative measures on principals in Virginia and Minnesota is summarized in this section.

**Virginia**

DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) made the assertion that Virginia’s principals represented a “profession under stress” (p. 59), as supported by the findings in a survey conducted by the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP) and the Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals (VASEP). The survey, designed to examine the conditions and concerns of principals, was mailed to 4,237 principals and assistant principals (49% men, 51% women) at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Overall, the perception of the principals’ role by various stakeholders was that the job of being a principal was becoming much more difficult. Moreover, the principals’ job becomes more demanding when issues and events that occur in the public also play themselves out in schools: for example, healthcare, immigration, acts of terror foreign or domestic, gang violence, economic downturns, global warming, and immigration. Greater details of some of the interesting survey findings are in the paragraphs that follow.

**Improving student learning.** It appears principals’ job responsibilities are increasing daily, while nothing is being taken away. In other words, principals are now consumed with becoming instructional leaders, while their other duties and responsibilities remain constant.
According to the survey (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003), an overwhelming majority of Virginia principals felt increased pressure as they were held accountable for increases in student achievement on the Virginia Standards of Learning. They described this pressure as their number one stressor because they were burdened with a host of issues directly related to improving instructional practices. These issues involved, among other things, instructional time, analyzing classroom practices, curriculum alignment, staff morale, and faculty and staff development (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Ironically, these principals even reported being stressed over learning how to become a leader and how to manage stress while delivering quality services to faculty, staff, and students.

**Day-to-day operations.** DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) found that managing day-to-day activities was the second cause of increased stress among the principals. Henceforth, having to engage in a variety of daily work responsibilities coupled with meeting federal, state, and local mandates (among them are Title 1, Title VI, or Title IX requirements), principals felt overwhelmed because they had little time left for completing paperwork, answering emails, supporting teachers, providing security, breaking up fights, curtailing bullying, and dealing with irate parents.

**Preparation.** Among other topics, the survey also covered preparation for the principals’ position, conditions of employment, changing role of the principal, and supply and demand (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). In the area of preparation for the principals’ position, a majority of the principals reported working as a classroom teacher in elementary, middle, or secondary school prior to becoming a principal. Furthermore, 75% of the principals reported having worked as an assistant principal prior to becoming a principal coupled with having a master’s degree.
Professional development needs coincided with principals’ concerns as building leaders (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Special education law and learning how to prepare, administer, and evaluate the Virginia Standards of Learning, were among the professional development concerns of the principals. Regarding these matters, they did report that the professional development events at the district level as well as those conducted by the professional associations were especially useful. However, they felt the least useful professional development activities were put on by their state department of education.

Another professional development concern was being an instructional leader, using multiple assessments, and working with faculty and staff. This was followed by not having enough time to work with students’ families.

**Condition of employment.** The next area covered in the survey was condition of employment (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Here, the number one concern was the length of time spent completing the job. A majority of the principals reported working more than 50 hours per week, which was a significant increase when compared to a survey, taken five years earlier. Moreover, nearly 50% of the principals reported their salaries had not kept up with the increasing job responsibilities. It is interesting to note that, while principals’ salaries had not kept pace, teachers’ salaries had increased at a faster rate over the same time period.

**Focus on test scores.** Virginia principals responding to the survey indicated by a greater than 7 out of 10 response rate that a focus on test scores was the biggest change they had experienced in their time as principals (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). This area was followed by broadened accountability for Virginia Standards of Learning, reaching federal mandates such as NCLB and RTTT, and as mentioned previously, special education laws (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).
**Filling vacancies.** Finally, in response to a question about filling vacant positions, a majority of the principals believed that long hours and stress were the primary barriers to persons entering the field as new principals (DiPoala & Tschannnen-Moran, 2003). Other barriers were greater responsibility and accountability along with low wages.

**Minnesota**

Not unlike other states, Minnesota also responded to the federal legislative initiatives, which included President Obama’s signature piece of legislation on education reform--Race to The Top (RTT). This initiative created opportunities for states to receive federal funding through a competitive grant in 2009 (Muenich, 2014), and contained a key RTTT provision that called for "the U.S. Department of Education to equate the effectiveness of school principals to student achievement outcomes" (NAESP & NASSP, 2009, p. 7).

Pursuant to that provision, during 2011 and 2012, the Minnesota legislature completed a revised version of its principal evaluations (Muenich, 2014, p. 280). Moreover, the new Minnesota statue, established that 35% of a principal’s evaluation would include student academic growth, as well as other achievement and target goals (Minnesota Department of Education, 2012). The new evaluation system, using 35%, paralleled other principal evaluation systems across the country. Although the Minnesota Professional Principals Association opposed using student achievement as 35% of a principal’s evaluation in the new law, that percentage was not as great as in some states. Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Wisconsin all required 50% of a principal’s evaluation be based on student achievement data (Guilfoyle, 2013). Michigan also required that 50% of a principal’s evaluation be inclusive of student achievement in 2013.
The Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) was asked to participate in research and evaluating secondary school principals’ perception of their performance (Muenich, 2014). Five hundred and eighty-two secondary school principals were emailed and asked to participate in the survey. One hundred and twenty-four, or 21.3% of the principals responded and were included in the study (Muenich, 2014, p. 285). The research found that 85% of Minnesota principals reported they had been evaluated in their current position, and 66% responded they had been evaluated within the past year (Muenich, 2014, p. 286). When the author removed principals currently in the first year of their assignment, the number increased to 92% evaluated in their current position. The number also increased to 70% of those who had been evaluated within the past 12 months (Muenich, 2014, p. 286).

In the final analysis, the author removed those principals who were currently in the first year of their assignment, and those remaining reported their latest evaluations used a wide variety of measures including a checklist of character traits, outputs of student achievement, some form of narrative or written summary, and multiuser evaluation forms including supervisors, teachers, and parents (Muenich, 2014). As a result of the variety of methods and different forms used raised questions about the overall quality of the evaluation process (Muenich, 2014). Thus, a majority of Minnesota principals did not see how their evaluations were useful for professional growth.

Using the standards established in the Inter-State Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), the principals were asked to rank their duties and to rank how they perceived how their supervisors would rank those same duties (Muenich, 2014). The survey revealed their ranking in the following order of importance: instructional leadership, acting with integrity and ethics, creating a vision for the school, management of daily, communication with community, and legal
and political aspects. On the other hand, the principals perceived their supervisors’ ranking of their job duties in the following order of importance: instructional supervision, creating a vision for your school, management of daily operations, acting with integrity and ethics, communicating with community, and understanding legal and political aspects.

It was interesting to note that, though there is some agreement, the principals’ perceptions of their job responsibilities and priorities did not square entirely with how they perceived their supervisors ranking of the importance of their duties. This could be a potential source of stress for principals, especially when it comes to their evaluation for effectiveness.

It is also interesting to note that, according to the survey, the principals devoted an inordinate amount of their time on duties that are not at the top of their importance ranking. For example, they reported spending the majority of their time on managing daily operations, but they ranked instructional leadership as their first order of importance. This suggests that this is another factor which could have some serious implications when principals are evaluated.

Regarding evaluation, 89% of principals agreed that student achievement data should be factored into the evaluation process for evaluating secondary school principal performance (Muenich, 2014, p. 295). However, the principals disagreed on the use of student achievement being 35% of their evaluation, and the majority agreed that a range from 10% to 25% would be sufficient.

A related matter is that Minnesota’s statutes do not specify which type of student achievement data should be used in principal evaluations. A majority of secondary principals favored graduation rates, followed by the North West Evaluation Association (NWEA) or other assessments, attendance rates, or Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments scores based on yearly
growth models. The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment was designed to measure yearly progress in reading and mathematics (Muenich, 2014, p. 292).

Finally, according to Muenich (2014), nearly 75% of the districts participating in the school survey reported that year-end evaluations were also used to plan professional development activities. Moreover, the year-end evaluations were used to inform individualized professional coaching support for teachers and administrators.

**Michigan**

The Midwest Education Trust (Ed Trust), a non-profit think tank, looked at the issues facing Michigan’s principals and teacher evaluations and found them to be troublesome, according to a published article on “Teacher Evaluations in Michigan” (Education Trust, 2011). In the article, the authors claimed the problems with evaluation in Michigan go back to 2009.

According to the Midwest Education Trust (2011), “Michigan citizens and more importantly its students are being cheated because of inconsistency in evaluating school personnel” (p. 1). The contention that Michigan has a poor evaluation system takes into account four areas of concern, namely: decisions affecting educators’ and students’ lives were based on an unreliable state test given in the fall of the year; there is no clear definition of what effective teaching looks like in Michigan; the goals were not clear as to what Michigan teachers and school leaders were working toward, there were no statewide standards for evaluating teachers, and districts that need an exemplary model to follow did not have one available.

Further consideration of the status of educator evaluation in Michigan is found in a policy brief produced by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE): Educator Evaluations and Effectiveness in Michigan: An Analysis of 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 Educator Evaluation Surveys and Educator Effectiveness Data. Overall, the report indicated that Michigan suffers
from the same conditions as many other states. At the time of the study, principals and teachers were evaluated using every kind of tool imaginable--checklists, surveys, narratives, and multiple user forms--without any identifiable standard measure of quality. As a result of this work, the MDE (2012) stated that “Statewide, 97% - 98% of all educators were rated as effective or highly effective” (p. 8). Furthermore, student growth data had no relationship to whether a teacher or administrator was viewed as highly effective, effective, minimally effective, or ineffective in their summative evaluation (MDE, 2015, p. 2). The MDE report further noted that, even in the absence of student growth data, educators were more likely to be rated effective (MDE, 2015).

Furthermore, the report also noted, “Overall, educator effectiveness ratings appear to have little relationship to school accountability labeling” (MDE, 2015, p. 2). Thus, it does not matter if you teach at a Reward School or Priority School, proportionally ineffective teachers work in both classifications. It was interesting to note that Michigan educators reported that similar to other states, Reward Schools were more likely to have effective and highly effective administrators, and not likely to have ineffective ones. Conversely, Priority Schools or Focus Schools were more likely to have minimally effective or ineffective administrators in charge (MDE, 2015, p. 2).

According to the executive director of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association, the state is experiencing a 40% turnover in principals. The average time principals stay on the job is two years before they quit (P. Liabenow, personal communication, December 16, 2015). This high turnover rate alone suggests that Michigan principals are working under stress.

In sum, a review of relevant research on the principals in Virginia, Minnesota, and Michigan informs us that principals are caught up in a world wind of change, and given the
broad scope of challenges in our educational institution; their role in that institution is indeed a stressful one. The following section discusses some salient factors related to stress and leadership.

**Principal Stress and Burnout**

The middle school principals are the central figures in my study, and like all school principals, they have the responsibility to both manage and provide leadership for their teachers, staff, students, and community stakeholders. Yet only a handful of studies could be found that looked at the impact of stress on principals. The paragraphs below discuss these studies.

**Principals and Stress**

As stated earlier, school principals are leaving the profession early and retiring at an increasing rate, the stress associated with changing, complex, and demanding job duties could be a major contributor to this trend. Some researchers have concluded there is a high correlation between stress and burnout and burnout is a significant factor in the lives of school principals (Boyland, 2011, Friesen & Sarros, 1989; Proethoe, 2009; Zubrzycki, 2012).

Hobson et al. (2003) identified seven common challenges faced by school leaders in Great Britain, Europe, and the United States. The seven common challenges were: (a) feelings of professional isolation and loneliness; (b) dealing with the legacy, practice, and style of the previous school leader; (c) dealing with multiple tasks managing time, and priorities; (d) managing the school budget; (e) dealing with (e.g., supporting, warning, dismissing) ineffective staff; (f) implementing new government initiatives, notably new curricula or school improvement projects and problems with school buildings and site management (Hobson et al., 2003). Collectively trying to successfully complete these job responsibilities added to the stress principals routinely must cope with.
In a study on stress and principals, Boyland (2011) conducted a statewide study of Indiana’s principals, and 193 principals from 79 counties responded to the survey. Ninety-two percent of those principals reported experiencing moderate or high job stress high (specifically, high stress 39%, 53% moderate stress, and 8% low stress). Boyland emphasized task overload as the number one factor responsible for the increased stress among elementary principals; task overload defined as having too many job-related tasks to complete in a specific timeframe. When veteran principals answered the question about whether principals feel their job stress has increased overtime, 70% of the principals, with five years or more experience as a principal, reported feeling more stress at the time of the survey than in previous years. In sum, “The job is more stressful now because of increased pressure and time demands by the state and federal government, like more paper work, testing, and making AYP, but we get no additional help” (Boyland, 2011, p. 6). Henceforth, 69% of the principals reported that job stress has affected their health and wellness in a negative manner. High blood pressure, trouble sleeping, fatigue, anxiety or depression, and headaches were some of the complaints reported by the elementary principals: Thus, the author concluded that a positive correlation between principals’ level of stress and health concerns was quite possible.

In another research study, Poirel, Lapointe, and Yvon (2012) discussed the virtues of working as a principal in Quebec. The authors hypothesized that principal jobs are difficult and have become more complex given administrative mandates and school reform. Thus, as a result, principals are experiencing more health-related concerns, based on how the principals handle stress and employ coping skills.

The Poirel et al. (2012) study’s foundation was created around three central questions. The first question examined the main sources of stress that the school administrators face daily.
The second question explored if the sources of stress differed based on demographic data: elementary versus secondary school, principal versus assistant principal, gender, age, or experience. Finally, the third research question differentiated how principals cope with the most important sources of stress in the workplace, emotion-focused or problem-focused.

Poirel et al. (2012) found principals are more responsive to stress created by administrative constraints than by any other factor. There was also a difference in the amount of stress reported by principals and vice principals. The principals at the elementary position reported being more susceptible to stress. The female principals reported feeling more stress with respect to the principal responsibilities and role expectations when compared to their male counterparts (Poirel et al., 2012).

Overall, the findings of the Quebec study indicated principals experience stress over administrative constraints and administrative responsibilities (Poirel et al., 2012). Principals reported not having enough time to complete the daily tasks associated with the job. Women principals reported feeling additional pressure based on role expectations. The high school principals also reported being more stressed than elementary principals and assistant principals.

Indeed, according to the Center for the Promotion of Health in New England (2016), 40% of job turnover is due to stress. However, finding training, and or replacing administrators and or teachers is not cheap. In fact, it has been estimated that “replacing an average employee costs 120-200% of the salary of the position affected” (para. 2). Thus, billion a year in health costs, absenteeism and poor performance” (para. 2). Thus, the financial implications of stress in the workplace due to absenteeism and loss worker productivity have serious consequences for both the educator leaders and the school.
**Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion**

A review of the literature makes it clear that stress has the potential to have a significant effect on the work of school principals (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Brock and Grady (2002) have indicated that burnout tends to surface in five areas, namely: physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual. And some of the early warning signs of burnout are: feelings of mental and physical exhaustion; feelings out of control, overwhelmed; increased isolation from family, friends, and colleagues; a sense of declining productivity or lack of accomplishment dreading going to work in the morning (Brock & Grady, 2002, p. 9).

Psychiatrist Freudenberger first defined burnout in 1974, followed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), who defined burnout as high emotional exhaustion, feelings of depersonalization, and feeling of low personal accomplishment. This phenomenon of stress and burnout among educators is not limited to just the United States. For example, in 1989, Friesen and Sarros studied the relationship between stress and burnout in a Western Canadian urban school district and found the greatest predictor for emotional exhaustion was work-stress for both administrators and teachers; work overload definitely contributes to both stress and burnout. They reasoned “In the conventional view, burnout derives from the presence of strain-making stressors that can overwhelm coping capabilities” (Frisen & Sarros, 1989, p. 180).

Maslach et al. (1982) defined emotional exhaustion as a pattern of emotional overload when a person feels drained and used up, and lacking energy to face another day; and it occurs as result of lack of resources and diminished control of coping, social support, and autonomy decisions. These scholars contend that evidence of a principal entering a phase of emotional exhaustion can be observed in a principal who can no longer give psychological support to teachers, students, or support staff. When a principal observes that he or she is becoming more
callous toward clientele, has a laissez-faire attitude, or interactions that are becoming more and more negative, the principal maybe entering a phase of depersonalization. When principals begin to feel unhappy with their work and their interactions with their clientele, it is likely that they are experiencing low feelings of personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 1996).

Research on Coping and School Principals

As mentioned earlier, strain-making stressors can overwhelm a person’s coping mechanisms. Lazarus (1998) defined coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing the limits of one’s resources” (p. 201). Coping may be healthy or unhealthy, and does not have a definite time line (Monat et al., 2007). The literature identifies two types of coping: (a) emotional-focused coping, which focuses on managing stressful emotions, and (b) problem-focused coping, which involves changing the conditions or the environment causing the distress (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, Delongis, & Green, 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1980, 1984). Most people use both types interchangeably. Additionally, people rely on the fight or flight syndrome as a means of employing active or avoidant coping mechanism (Moos, 2003). The remainder of this section focuses on research conducted on coping mechanisms among school principals specifically.

Reynolds and O’Dwyer (2006) designed an investigation to examine the relationship about principals’ leadership effectiveness, emotional intelligence, and coping mechanisms for stress. Their goal was to determine if, after controlling for background characteristics, emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms could predict leadership effectiveness. In their study, 65 middle school principals participated, representing 58% of the middle school principal population in Massachusetts. In this investigation, Reynolds and O’Dwyer used Kouzes and Posner’s (2003) Leadership Performance Inventory to measure leadership effectiveness; Moos’
Coping Response Inventory to measure coping responses to stressful situations; and finally, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso’s (2002) Emotional Intelligence Test to measure emotional intelligence.

At the outset, school principals in the Reynolds and O’Dwyer’s (2006) study perceived their roles as unbalanced and demanding. Governmental policies, community demands, corporate interests, and technology all contributed to the levels of stress experienced by them. Coincidently, Reynolds and O’Dwyer found that principals’ ability to cope with these and other stressors was positively related to effective leadership. Based on this finding, Reynolds and O’Dwyer concluded that the more principals are adequately trained in the use of coping skills, the more principals are capable of performing effective leadership. They further concluded that a positive relationship exists between leadership and coping skills at the system and individual levels. This finding is consistent with another study conducted by Fullan (1998), who reported that effective leaders can develop a set of strengths as they become resilient school leaders. He identified the resilient strengths as (a) accurately assess past and current reality, (b) be positive about future possibilities, (c) remain true to personal values, (d) maintain a strong sense of self efficacy, (e) invest personal energy wisely, and (f) act on the courage of personal convictions. Fullan concluded his line of reasoning by stating it takes strength for a principal to move on when facing adversity.

It should be acknowledged that the issue of pressures and coping is not limited to principals in the United States. For example, Nir (2009) completed a qualitative study on principals in Israel and found they were under an enormous amount of pressure to succeed. Their pressures emanated from a variety of sources, which included the Ministry of Education, superintendents, peers, teachers, parents, and community members. All these stakeholders
looked to the principals to resolve whatever problems they were facing. The principals in Israel identified feeling lonely working at the top as a primary problem (Nir, 2009). It was also noted that when principals sought help from other individuals within the organization, it was often used as a weapon against them. Regarding the formal system, there is the belief that the system lacked sufficient resources to provide adequate assistance to those principals in need of help. Thus, it appeared that going to the Ministry of Education for assistance was often futile because the Ministry would often pass the dilemma back to them (Nir, 2009).

Feeling a lack of support, the principals in the Israel study often refused to seek professional help and relied on help from lay members of society as a coping strategy, which was often inadequate or marginal at best (Nir, 2009). Principals operating with in this context sought advice from persons whose advice had no benefit professionally within the organization. The author concluded, “those who are most in need due to their hierarchical position and role complexity are least likely to become involved in help seeking behaviors. Hence, high power positions simultaneously create the need for help and the obstacles to ask for it” (Nir, 2009, p. 186).

Another study involved South African primary principals in 2011, who used controlled breathing techniques as a coping strategy when necessary. The issues which caused the most stress for the South African principals from KwaZulu, Natal were: (a) lack of resources; (b) learner discipline; (c) lack of parental involvement; (d) teacher misconduct; (e) multiplicity of task; (f) conflict with stakeholders; and (g) lack of departmental support (Van der Merwe & Parsotam, 2011, p. 671). The South African principals reported increased stress had a negative effect on their ability to think logically, or clearly. In short, increased stress impaired their executive cognition functions (Van der Merwe & Parsotam, 2011). The stressors identified by
the principals from KwaZulu-Natal are parallel to the issues identified by principals in research studies in Chapter II of this study, yet this study went further to also look at coping strategies.

Six out of 49 primary school principals in KwaZulu-Natal agreed to participate in Van de Merwe and Parsotam’s (2011) mixed methods study. The principals were given the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which is designed to measure burnout by looking at three areas emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment and depersonalization. The principals were given this test to measure how the principals looked at their levels of stress before and after attending a five-day Art of Living workshop on controlled breathing. The workshop was conducted on five consecutive days and each workshop lasted for three hours (Van de Merwe & Parsotam, 2011). The principals were allowed to practice what they had learned for six weeks before the Maslach Burnout Inventory and in depth interviews were conducted. Findings revealed that these principals reported that learning controlled breathing techniques, as a strategy for reducing stress, was effective. The number one benefit at a socio-psychological level was the ability to relax and remain calm (p. 673). On a socio physical level the principals reported improved sleeping after learning about controlled breathing. The principals reported learning-controlled breathing helped calm them down creating a sense of inner peace which lead to increased energy. The principals reported learning-controlled breathing techniques allowed them to gain a feeling of control coupled with the ability to think clearly improved their perception of productivity.

In other work, Ashton and Duncan (2012) developed a tool kit to identify both the challenges and skills needed to effectively assume a principal’s position. They identified three themes: (1) dealing with professional isolation and loneliness; (2) getting to know the context and thriving in a rural community; and (3) basic management skills for the lone administrator. The researchers also developed eight tools which supported the three themes: (a) find a mentor;
(b) develop personal resilience with healthy coping mechanisms; (c) develop personal resilience with purpose; (d) establish key relationships; (e) take the time to build rapport; (f) infusing the vision; and (g) effective scheduling for instructional leadership (pp. 20-27). While Ashton and Duncan’s work focused on principals in rural schools, these issues are similar to those found in urban and suburban school districts.

In a different study looking at job stress and coping strategies of elementary principals in Indiana, Boyland (2011) asked six open-ended questions designed to identify the type of stress, degree of intensity, and what coping strategies principals were using to manage the stress. Boyland further identified the 20 most common coping strategies used to manage stress by elementary principals in Indiana. She also reported these strategies were supported in the literature by Latimore (2003), Queen and Queen (2005), and Weil (2007). Boyland suggested that school administrators must become cognizant of the importance of being educated in stress management to combat the ill effects of stress on their health and job effectiveness. The author articulated that the importance of this matter could not be understated principals need to follow a personal stress management plan (Boyland, 2011, p. 7). She believes professional development in stress management should become the norm and prospective principal candidates should begin learning stress management at the university level. Boyland continues this line of reasoning with the belief that stress management is most effective when used in the form of prevention.

The 20 coping strategies identified in the (Boyland, 2011, p. 9) study are briefly listed:

1. regular exercise;
2. try to leave work on time;
3. take time to eat during the day;
4. don’t dwell on mistakes;
5. journaling;
6. get out of the office and go be with the kids;
7. network with others;
8. play relaxing or instrumental music;
9. increase your daily levels of communication;
10. write out tomorrow’s to do list before you leave today;
11. look at the big
picture; (12) don’t make snap decisions (unless it is an emergency); (13) don’t take it personally; (14) keep your sense of humor; (15) be optimistic; (16) hire good staff; (17) balance your life; (18) identify something you really enjoy that is healthy for you; (19) deep breathing; (20) get organized.

In yet another study on principals’ coping with stress, Allison (1997), reported that principals are working in stressful conditions, face very busy, complicated days, and often have competing groups vying for their time. The decisions routinely made by principals cover a wide spectrum, which includes apathy, angst, anger, arbitration and agreement with other school administrators, union officials, social workers, police, parents and many other parties. The principal, the one constant in the decision making process, ultimately feels different levels of pressure as all parties are looking to the principal for the answer to resolve whatever problem may exist.

According to Allison (1997), principals in Vancouver, British Columbia Canada are facing increased stress, pressure for educational accountability and reform similar to principals in others parts of the world. Allison stated the increased stress has resulted in poor health, heart attacks and death for some school administrators in Canada. These factors have lead school districts and professional associations to develop programs to teach school administrators about health and wellness programs that include coping skills. This is relevant as Heibert’s (1987) research on coping identifies two schools of thought on how to handle work place stress. The first approach, identified as stressor management, focuses on situational factors and methods of reducing the demands of the situation (the work environment) on the individual. The second approach, identified as stress management, focuses on the behavioral, cognitive, or physiological components of an individual response (the person) in an effort to permit calmer
responses to demanding situations (para. 10). Allison reflected “since stress cannot be avoided, identification of effective coping strategies may provide school principals with the tools which can be used to reduce the amount of stress from the environment and to moderate the effects of stress on the individual” (para. 2).

In the Allison (1997) study involving 1,455 public schools elementary and secondary school principals, a survey, which included the Coping Preference Scale, was mailed out to all of the principals: 643 or 44.2% responded and results were included in this study. Allison (1997) indicated that based on the review of the literature it is believed that principals will benefit from ongoing staff development related to stress management techniques. Listed below are the top 10 of the twenty six strategies most frequently identified coping strategies used by BC principals participating in the study. Given a mean score of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 0.44 items 1-3 had means of 4.00 or better. This means not only were the strategies the most preferred they were also the most effective. Coping strategies 4-7 had scores also above the mean with scores ranging from 3.52-3.79. Which translates to these strategies were also preferred greater than the average but were slightly less effective than strategies 1-3. Finally coping strategies 8-10 were also at or above the mean which means they were preferred less than strategies 1-7 but more than items 11-26.

Upon closer inspection, the 10 most frequently identified coping strategies included: (1) practice good human relation skills with staff, students, and parent; (2) maintain a sense of humor; (3) approach problems optimistically and objectively; (4) maintain regular sleep habits; (5) set realistic goals recognize job limitations; (6) delegate responsibility; (7) talk with family member or close friends; (8) engage in active non-work or play activities, (e.g. boating, camping, fishing, gardening or golfing); (9) engage in less active non-work or play activities
(dine out, attend cultural events, sports event or movies); (10) work harder including evenings and weekends. The majority of the strategies employed were characterized as stress management strategies, defined as focusing on changing the individual. This is decidedly different from stressor management strategies focused on changing the environment (para. 16).

The next objective of the Allison (1997) study focused on two narrative questions, which garnered over 600 written responses. The responses clustered around seven themes (1) realistic perspective; (2) positive attitude; (3) good physical health program; (4) intellectual, social, and spiritual; (5) increased involvement; (6) time management and organization; (7) withdrawal and recharging. These responses suggest that principals alternate between stress management methods, a systems approach and a non-systems approach use of individual stress reducing strategies.

**Chapter II Summary**

This literature review for Chapter II identified schools as one of the major institutions in the United States. It informs the reader on the need for school reform, the history of middle school reform, and information on recent federal and state mandates. Supplementary to the conversation on such mandates, is a myopic view of how the principals’ role in Virginia, Minnesota, and Michigan have evolved.

With, a conversation on the impact of school reform on the lives of school principals ensued, with principal leadership, stress, emotional intelligence and coping skills as the key components. This led to a final conversation involving coping strategies principals are using on several continents to manage the stress inherent with their positions. Finally, this leads us to a detailed discussion of methodology used in my study, found in Chapter III.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

I have a longstanding interest in leadership, especially those individuals working as middle school principals in Michigan. My curiosity about principals intensified when educational reforms at the federal and state levels came down in the form of mandates. I became curious about how those mandates affected the professional and personal lives of middle school principals. I wanted to study this phenomenon to explore middle school principals’ perceptions, attitudes, and their behaviors in response to the stress and “strain” of being a principal.

In order to capture the essence of the lives of middle school principals, I had to achieve the goal of deeply probing their lived experiences. Thus, a qualitative phenomenological method was applied. Twelve middle school principals, each having a minimum of three years’ experience, were invited to participate in the study. This chapter presents the methodology used to conduct the study. Specifically, it discussed the research design, sampling procedure, sample, instrumentation, data collection procedure, data analysis, limitations, delimitations, reflexivity, and chapter summary.

Research Design

“The historic origin for qualitative research comes from anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation” (Creswell, 2014, p. 13). Overtime, experts in the field have identified several assessment tools which may be placed under the general qualitative methods umbrella, namely: grounded theory, narrative research, ethnography, case study, and phenomenology. According to Creswell (2014), at most the fundamental level, the five differ in what they are trying to accomplish---their foci or the primary objectives of the studies (Creswell, 2007, p. 77). Given the nature and scope of my study, it was decided that the phenomenology
method would be the best approach to gaining an understanding of the lived experiences of men and women in their role as middle school principals.

Moreover, according to Creswell (2014), “phenomenological research is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study” (p. 245). This is important because two people may experience the same phenomenon or circumstance yet their perception of what occurred may differ significantly. Since this investigation serves as an excellent way of gaining an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the middle school principal who realized that – due to federal and state mandates= their behavior is under constant scrutiny. Thus, the goal of this study was to create an accurate picture of middle school principals. Simply put, this study attempted to understand what coping skills and mechanisms principals utilize daily.

Creswell (2014) stated interviewing is an appropriate form of data collection and is often used as an aspect of phenomenological studies. Specifically, the design used semi-structured interviews utilizing open-ended questions in conjunction with prepared probes (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 91). First, the principals were asked to complete Allison Coping Preference Survey (1997), followed by completing an in-depth interview. Together the survey and interview took a look at how principals manage school accountability issues, as well as, explore what coping skills and mechanisms they have utilized to manage the inherent “stress” and “strain” prompted by implementing the federal and state mandates.

**Population and Sample**

The sample for this study was drawn from principals who are members of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA) and Michigan Association Secondary School Principals (MASSP). These are the leading professional associations
advocating for middle school principals serving school districts within the state. MEMSPA is an advocacy group that works to develop principals by providing the tools necessary for its members to become successful as leaders in the 21st century. As an organization, MEMSPA is divided into 14 regions across the state. It has approximately 1,000 members with 225 of those being middle school principals in the west side of the state in a four-region area (MEMSPA, 2017).

In this context, I think it is important to mention that I communicated the nature of this study to the Executive Director of MEMSPA, and he believed this study has the potential to benefit his members. Hence, he agreed to endorse the study by notifying the principals of the study via email and asking them to participate. As such I utilized the principle of “gate keeper” sampling that is getting permission from a person in authority to assist with gaining the membership support (Creswell, 2104). Additionally a director from an intermediate school district recruited several principals.

**Sampling Procedure**

According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), strategic sampling is purposive and focuses on unique cases, and this method, as described by the authors, was used to invite 12 principals to participate in this study. However due to unforeseen difficulty with recruiting participants. I ended up using a convenience sample of 12 middle school principals. Contextually, Miles et al. note researchers must have a strategy to gather information from a focused sample. Since the focus of my study is on exploring the lives of middle school principals involved with school reform, my strategy for selecting the middle school principals was as follows:
1. Obtained a list of middle school principals working in public schools from the state department of education using the MDE website.

2. Selected schools from the MDE list that are in the western side of the state which was convenient for conducting face to face interviews.

3. For validation purposes, eliminated any school where I had any family members attending, or working.

4. Secured a list of Michigan Elementary Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA) administrators working as public schools’ principals on the west side of the state.

5. Purged the list of any MEMSPA administrator not working in a public middle school as a middle school principal.

6. Cross referenced the list of MEMSPA middle schools’ principals with the list of MDE middle school principals from the west side of the state.

7. I sent an email to all these principals, explaining the research study and providing the criteria for participating in the study.

8. For principals who met the above criteria and agreed to participate in the study, I sent them a follow up email that included the consent form, as well as information about scheduling the interview. The consent forms were reviewed and signed prior to the interview being conducted.

9. I also used a snowballing technique whereby I asked those who I interviewed if they knew of other middle school principals in the region who might be interested in participating. An administrator at a regional intermediate school district also helped me identify principals until I had 12 who consented to participate.
Before I recruited any individual to participate in the investigation, I gained permission from the human subjects’ review board, through Western Michigan University. Creswell (2014) states as follow: “Researchers need to have their research plans reviewed by an institutional review board (IRB) on their college and university campuses” (p. 95). IRB committees exist on campus because of federal regulations that provide protection against human rights violations. The IRB committee requires the researcher to assess the potential risk for participation in a study, such as physical, psychological, social, economic or legal harm (Sieber, 1998). Also, the researcher needs to consider the special needs of vulnerable populations, such as minors (under the age of 19) mentally incompetent participants, victims, persons with neurological impairments, pregnant women, or fetuses, prisoners, and individuals with AIDS. As a researcher, I filed an application with the IRB that contains procedures and information about participants so that the committee can review the extent to which you place participants at risk in your study (p. 95). My approval letter is found in the Appendix.

**Instrumentation**

My instrumentation consisted of two tools, the Coping Preference Survey (CPS) by Allison (year), and a semi-structured interview protocol. Phenomenological researchers want to know what and how the phenomenon occurred. In the final analysis, my primary goal was to gather an accurate picture of the professional and personal life of the principal within the context of accountability, stress, and coping skills semi structured interview helped bring this study into focus. The interview questions are designed to examine three areas, namely: (1) to explore the details of three primary areas of the principals’ work, including operations, academic concerns, and relationships, (2) to explore how the areas previously examined, affect the principals thinking, and behavior, and finally, (3) to explore how principals are handling their work.
Specifically, it is here that I wanted to ascertain what coping skills principals were using in the conduct of their work. In short, I believed that this study would provide information to develop a realistic picture of the professional and personal life of the principal.

With that being said, as the researcher, I was also part of the instrumentation. The way I ask questions, interact with participants, and interpret data may have influenced my study’s results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Because of this, the authors articulate that instrumentation is often “defined as a threat to internal validity” (p. 539). Therefore, I needed to be cognizant of how I can potentially impact the research.

A variety of strategies were employed which increase the trustworthiness, validity, and credibility of the study itself. These strategies included conducting a pilot study, taping of the interviews, making transcripts, coding my field notes, rechecking with principals for transcript accuracy, and discussing emergent themes with critical friends to ensure analyses were grounded in the data (Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The excellence of research rests in large part on the excellence of coding (Strauss, 1987, p. 27). It is widely known that the researcher has the burden to resolve any ethical or legal issues prior to the collection of and analysis of any data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Thus, should there be any confusion over the signing of the consent agreement, the research protocol, or failure to consent to the interview being audio taped, then, that individual was not be permitted to participate in this study.

The field notes, interviews, transcripts and survey results helped paint a picture that helped provide answers to the research questions. After the interview was completed, I followed the following analysis steps. I started by hiring a professional stenographer to transcribe the
interview, while I personally transcribed the field notes. I then shared the individual transcripts with each principal, asking them to review the content, adding and deleting as they wanted. I listened to the recorded sessions several times while I followed along with the transcripts, taking notes to myself and making sure I was actively listening. I then wrote an individual narrative profile for each principal, capturing the principal’s voice utilizing the phrases, clusters and themes identified in each interview, as well as a summary of their Coping Preference Survey data. I then looked across all 12 of the principal interviews and narratives, looking for themes and subthemes.

**Limitations**

There is always the potential limitation that the middle school principals were neither willing nor able to separate the stresses and pressures of daily living from those stresses caused by daily work activities. There was also a possibility that middle school principals did not distinguish stress and pressure caused by implementing the federal and state mandates, from pressure and stress caused by implementing daily work activities.

**Delimitations**

The delimitations, or parameters, of this study are as follows. This study explored middle school principals only; neither elementary nor high school principals were involved. Moreover, neither public school academies nor private nor parochial schools’ principals were included. Therefore, since only public middle schools located in one geographical region in one Midwest state were investigated, generalizations to other populations are not appropriate.

**Role of the Researcher**

Creswell (2014) defined reflexivity as “the researcher’s explanation of how my personal background, culture, and experiences hold the potential for shaping my interpretations, such as
the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to data” (p. 186). Utilizing this definition of reflexivity and reflecting on working as a former middle school principal, I was aware of my affinity for working with middle school principals. As a form of bracketing, I wrote out my experiences of leading each category of middle school Rewards, Focus and Priority. This technique helped me purge my many suppositions of how I acted and thus expected the principals to behave in a similar manner. After writing out my thoughts I was able to clear my mind and truly focus on what the principals were saying.

Also revisiting the pilot study helped me clear my mind of bias I had developed based on how I reacted to leading a Rewards, Focus, and Priority Middle School. After talking with the elementary principal who participated in my pilot, it was clear that my belief that stress caused by teacher evaluations and principal evaluations were paramount to identifying the stress principals experienced was wrong. I realized that by allowing my ego to focus on what I had accomplished blinded me from taking an in-depth look at what the principals had experienced and reported out in the interviews.

**Chapter III Summary**

This chapter described an exploratory phenomenological study whose methodology was chosen to answer specific research questions on accountability, stress, and coping skills. My study focused on capturing the lived experiences of middle school principals in a Mid-western state, whose lives were impacted by federal and state mandates. The subjects of the study were 12 middle school principals with a minimum of three years’ experience. Each middle school principal was invited to complete Allisons’ Coping Preference Survey and participated in a semi-structured interview. The details presented in this chapter included the study’s research design, inclusive of sample, sampling procedure, instrumentation, data collection procedure, data
analysis, limitations, and delimitations. A final section on reflexivity, which incorporates a discussion of my experiences and biases as a middle school principal prior to conducting the study, concluded the chapter. Let us now turn to the results from this study in Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This chapter presents the profiles from interviews conducted with 12 Midwestern middle school principals regarding accountability, stress, and coping skills. I was interested in gaining an understanding of the self-care mechanisms principals have put in place to mitigate the stress inherent in their jobs. This qualitative study examined the experiences of 12 Midwestern administrators who have had at least three years of experience as a middle school principal.

Each principal participating in this study was interviewed and asked to complete the Coping Preference Scale (Allison, 1997). This chapter illuminates a summary of each principal while a horizontal presentation of the information occurs in Chapter V, where themes and subcategories are analyzed.

Principals were asked to answer nine interview questions in my pursuit of the following research questions:

1. In an era of enhanced accountability what increased responsibilities and major areas of stress are middle school principals experiencing?

2. How does any enhanced stress impact middle school principals, both professionally and personally?

3. What coping mechanisms do principals use to handle the stress of any increased responsibilities?

Real names are not used in these profiles with principals given pseudonyms by the author to protect their identity. Table 1 offers a summary of their demographic information.
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<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years of Assistant Principal Experience</th>
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<th>Number of Different Schools</th>
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<th>Years of Principal Experience</th>
<th>Number of Different Schools</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>Title 1</th>
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<td>516</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Achieve</td>
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</table>
Ten of the 12 principals interviewed were from the west side of the state, while the remaining two were from the east side of the state. All were males with bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Three had education specialist degrees and two had doctoral degrees. Eight had worked as assistant principals prior to becoming a principal, while four went straight from the classroom to the principal’s position. Seven of the principals had worked in more than one district, while another five worked only in one district.

The principals currently work in school buildings that range in population from about 250 to 1000 students. Seven of the 12 school buildings have Title1 school-wide programs, which mean they have a high concentration of students whose parents meet the threshold of living in poverty, as defined by the federal government. In addition to high concentrations of students living in poverty, Title1 schools typically have a high concentration of special education students, and or English Language Learners (ELL). These are students whose native language spoken in the home is a language other than English. The remainder of this chapter is a profile of the 12 middle school principals.

**Adam**

Adam has 30 years of experience, working as a teacher, assistant principal, and now as a principal. Adam has a bachelor’s and a master’s degree and works at a school that receives Title 1 funding, although his school does not reach the threshold for a school-wide Title 1 program. Thirty five percent of the students at his school qualify for free and reduced lunch.

**Increased Responsibility for Implementing Federal and State Programs**

Adam reflected on how his job had changed relative to implementing federal and state mandated programs. He concluded the greatest change in his behavior was how he manages his time. Adam explained “my assistant principal and I sit down every Monday and look at the
schedule to see who is going here and who is going there. We just do it. I am not sure it is a stress factor or not… being organized is a lot more important than it used to be for me.” Thus, he reported the additional time spent on teacher evaluations has had negative consequences, as he has “spent less time developing relationships with students.” Moreover, he felt his time spent meeting with teachers on school improvement has been devalued. Adam concluded that “every time you put something in, you take something out.”

**Increased Responsibility for Student Testing**

Adam recalled at the beginning of the school year staff meetings where he shared his philosophy that “students test scores cannot be looked at in isolation.” His additional responsibility for student testing comes in the form of trying to control the narrative. He works to insulate his students and staff from negative press associated with how well the students perform on the state assessment. He knows that the student test scores are going to be compared to other school districts within the county, and thus believes it is better to get out front of the story rather than react to it later. Adam said, “kids are more important than test scores …we don’t teach math, we don’t teach science, we don’t teach English, we teach kids.”

**Increased Responsibility for Teacher Evaluations**

Adam started this conversation by saying he did not stress over observing and evaluating teachers, but that “it is a huge part of the struggle.” He stated that “the job has changed drastically in the last couple of years; the greatest change has come in the area of teacher evaluation.” Consequently, he actually spends eight or nine meetings per teacher per year, instead of the required four meetings for teacher evaluation. According to Adam, the most intense of these meetings is the final meeting “when we review student achievement data.” Adam recalled, “teachers’ overall rating is based on prior teacher observation and student
achievement data.” This is especially important as final decisions regarding promotion, retention, demotion, and termination are based on this final evaluation. Moreover, he said, “I see myself as an evaluation observation person.” He said, “the observations take up a lot of my time.” He is responsible for evaluating nearly 40 teachers per year, which translates to “360 conferences per year, which is two a day, for 180 days.”

The district where Adam works has adopted the 5D Plus model of evaluation which is built on five themes: Purpose, Student Engagement, Assessment for Student Learning, Classroom Environment and Culture, and Curriculum and Pedagogy (MDE, 2019). Adam noted he first had reservations about implementing the new system; however, he admitted that “this process was better for students and the quality of instruction improved.”

**Increased Responsibilities for Principal Evaluation**

During our interview, Adam did not express that he felt any increased responsibility for his own evaluation as a principal. Furthermore, he did not go into details about the district’s formal principal evaluation process. He did share however that he has a relationship with the superintendent, and when it is time for his evaluation, he will sit down with the superintendent and they will complete his evaluation.

Adam appeared to be more concerned with accountability, especially, regarding public opinion and social media locally, rather than the issue of principal evaluation. When talking with his staff at the beginning of the year, he reminds them that he is an administrator 24/7 and thus held to a higher standard, and that they are teachers 24/7 and held to a higher standard. He continued by saying, “I feel it is my job to let them know, they are in the public eye, and are public servants” and “Now more than ever parents feel they have the right to know everything,
evaluate everything, and decide everything, no matter how well they are informed or uninformed.”

**Experiences with Significant Stress**

Adam made an interesting point when it came to discussing his experience with stress, sharing that working with parents who do not want to cut the “umbilical cord” is stressful. He noted “he has gone home this year with headaches on three separate occasions after working with parents who could not agree on what to do next.” According to Adam, once at home he vents to his wife. Furthermore, he believes that “middle school children have not changed, what has changed is parenting, and the way society views education.”

**Coping Strategies Frequently Used**

Adam said, “I am in great shape physically.” He loves being outdoors and doing things with his family and friends. Mentally, he tries to not make things worse than what they are; he also shares with his staff, it is not life or death and not to sweat the small stuff and in short, the need to develop a positive mental attitude.

During our conversation, Adam identified several strategies he uses to cope with stress. He says that when at school he gives it 100%, but when he is away from school, he leaves it all behind. Moreover, laughter is one of his coping strategies, and he noted, “I use humor to diffuse difficult situations with parents, students, and try to get everyone on the same page.” Upon reflection, he extended the conversation saying

> When I come to work and it is no longer fun, I can no longer enjoy my job, no longer laugh, then it is time to quit, but right now I am still too busy showing a kid how to box out, almost knocking the kid on the floor, and laughing, I get to be a teenager every day. What a great life.
Coping Preference Scale Findings

The responses Adam selected on the Coping Preference Scale were aligned with the statements he made during the interview. His selections included the following most frequently used coping skills: (1) maintain a sense of humor, (2) engaging in physical exercise, (3) talking with family members and friends, (4) leaving work at work, and (5) getting away by taking mini vacations on the weekend. Conversely, he identified two strategies he was not likely to use namely: (1) withdrawing physically from a stressful situation, and (2) using relaxation and stress management techniques (auto-hypnosis, biofeedback, meditation or yoga).

Table 2

Adam’s Coping Preference Scale Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a sense of humor</td>
<td>Withdraw, leave the building temporarily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical exercise</td>
<td>Using stress management techniques (e.g., yoga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with family and friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving work at work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting away, taking weekend vacations</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

David

David is a veteran educator with 20 years of experience working in an elementary school as a teacher, and in a middle school as a principal. David has a bachelor and a master’s degree. He works in a building that utilizes a school-wide Title 1 program.

Increased Responsibility for Federal and State Programs

When discussing overseeing federal and state programs, David reflected he supervises approximately 40 teachers and 950 students. Furthermore, he stated that “I had to be a good
steward over the use of those dollars; it is good to have the additional money, but sometimes it
seems like we are jumping through hoops.”

In order to stay in compliance, each teacher keeps individual journals chronicling how
Title 1 monies are being utilized. Furthermore, the secretary also keeps several notebooks as
evidence to show how the Title 1 dollars are spent. The same thing is true for School
Improvement grant funds. Consequently, “We have to prioritize how we are spending the money
and why we are spending it, what’s the effect of it.” Herein, he expressed some concern that
every year there is uncertainty of what spending is going to be acceptable, based on who is the
federal or state auditor. Thus, David acknowledges he is very aware of the differences between
supplementing and supplanting as defined in the mandates.

David says he is doing things now that he could not have imagined when he first
became principal; for example, he has to be certified in Active Shooter Training, Certified CPR
Training, ADA training, First Aide, How to make a Tourniquet, Epi Pen, Fire Drills, Disaster
Drills, and Tornado Drills. Each of these activities has its own protocol. Arguably these activities
suggest David has had an obvious increase in his responsibility as middle school principal.

**Increased Responsibility for Student Testing**

David reports his responsibilities increase as the state accountability mandates change.
Regarding student testing, he reflected ultimately, “you know you gotta look at the social
emotional piece…kids are more than test scores.” He remarked that MEAP and MSTEP are high
stakes tests; however, the bar for passing the MEAP was lower than the bar for passing the
MSTEP. As he discussed past practices utilized in preparation for these state tests, he surmised
that his elementary school students benefitted from a lot of test preparation for the MEAP and
noted that:
We use to push the limits, we did not cheat, but we came right up to the line, but we did not cross it. We would find out which types of testers were better. Like, if you were a morning tester or an afternoon tester. If you like to stand up while you test: if you need or like a bouncy chair to sit on.

David mentioned that his school did all these things until the state changed the testing requirements, mandating that everyone must test at the same time within a school year, and the same way using either computers, or paper and pencil. He did give the state credit that they are doing less testing than they previously did their first year of MSTEP.

**Increased Responsibilities for Teacher Evaluations**

The most important area where David has seen increased responsibilities is in teacher evaluation. He feels lucky that he works in a district with instructional coaches who assist with the implementation of the district’s instructional model. The district recently adopted the 5D Plus Teacher Evaluation Model, which was one of the evaluation models recommended by the Michigan Department of Education. He suggests the combination of using the district’s instructional model and the 5D Plus Teacher Evaluation Model has improved the quality of instruction in the district, noting:

I feel like as a building, we have an instructional model that we follow. That gives teachers a framework for lesson planning, and what their lessons should look like, and then also incorporating that 5D piece in there. I think that has been very positive.

Regarding evaluation, teachers are now okay with another teacher coming into their classroom observing, scripting, using rubrics and engaging in instructional dialogue. However, teachers are still uncomfortable sharing their findings with the building principal. David noted,
“in the old days, principals were building managers, but with this new model principals have become instructional supervisors.” This is a significant increase in responsibilities for him as a principal.

**Increased Responsibility for Principal Evaluation**

David expressed experiencing frustration with the old way that administrators had been evaluated. The old system relied on check boxes, and the process was not standardized. He recalled that there were times when a former superintendent would come by and say “sign this, I know you are doing a good job,” or the superintendent would come around when it was time to lay off staff. Either way left him uncomfortable with the process and David noted their new evaluation model for administrators was much better. His district uses MASA School Advance, which is one of the recommended evaluation tools approved by the Michigan Department of Education. He reflected the instrument is a lot like the teacher’s evaluation instrument in that it has 5 Domains: (1) Results, (2) Leadership, (3) Systems, (4) Processes, and (5) Capacity. He reflected the evaluation system is also tied to his building’s student achievement data and is more difficult than the previously used evaluation model.

**Experiences with Significant Stress**

Reflecting on his experience as a principal, David noted, “a lack of communication between school stakeholders can be a source of stress” and added that communicating with different stakeholders can be difficult sometimes, whereby what is reflected to one staff member is misinterpreted. According to David, stress may manifest itself in different forms, because he (1) might make a hasty decision, (2) does not shut it down enough, (3) does not delegate well, (4) does not get enough exercise, (5) does not eat properly, and (6) works long hours.
Furthermore, he identified an array of stressors such as Facebook which he called the slam book for this generation; having a child commit suicide and wondering if there is something more he could have done to help this kid; losing a teacher to cancer; watching when one of the students’ parents goes to prison; having an expulsion hearing; or having to terminate a staff member. David also expressed frustration with the structure and role of being a middle school principal, saying that “As a middle management position, sometimes you have to implement things that you do not necessarily agree with or enforce decisions you had no input in making.”

**Most Frequently Used Coping Skills**

David noted, “life experiences have taught him that life is too short so you can’t sweat the small stuff.” Furthermore, he believes that school-wide professional development has been helpful in putting everyone on the same page. David identified “Capturing Kids Hearts” as catalyst in creating a healthy school culture by focusing on treating everyone with respect, being kind, and being polite. Moreover, he mentioned the importance of leading by example as he mentors some of the most at-risk children in his school. David believes the mentoring relationship has helped him cope with stress. Subsequently, he has made a conscience effort not to play favorites with teachers and support staff.

He expressed the excitement of enjoying a good laugh and using humor to cope with stress. Going to the gym and shooting some baskets, or just closing the door and sitting quietly are other measures he employs when dealing with stressful situations. Other times, he may get with his assistant principal and vent. Moreover, he likes going to the beach, drinking specialty beers, going to sporting events, movies, and vacations. These are some of the main strategies he uses to cope with stress.
Coping Preference Scale Findings

David selected three activities that he most frequently uses as a form of coping: (1) set realistic goals, (2) maintain a sense of humor, and (3) approach problems optimistically and objectively. These activities selected were consistent with his interview. Conversely, David selected one activity he would never likely engage in, which is withdrawing physically or leaving the building when facing a difficult situation.

Table 3

David’s Coping Preference Scale Summary

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
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<td>Set realistic goals</td>
<td>Withdraw, physically leave the building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain sense of humor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Optimistic and objective problem-solving</td>
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Ed

Ed is a veteran educator with 25 years of experience working as a teacher, assistant principal and principal. He has a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree. He leads a school with 700 students and has a school-wide Title 1 program. Ed was pleased to have it known he is from a long line of educators.

Increased Responsibilities for Implementing Federal and State Programs

Ed used the story of Sisyphus from Greek Mythology to discuss increased responsibilities with federal and state programs in his role as principal. He compared meeting the federal and state guidelines to the plight of Sisyphus who would push a boulder to the top of a hill and at night the boulder would roll back to the bottom of the hill. The next day, Sisyphus would start all over pushing the boulder up the hill and at night the boulder would roll down again. Ed articulated because of the constantly changing mandates, administrators working in K-12
education systems are analogous to Sisyphus. For example, teacher and administrator evaluations are connected to how well students perform on the state assessment. He continued the actual percentage has changed from 40% to 20% and is part of a formula used to determine if a teacher or principal is evaluated as highly effective, effective, moderately effective or ineffective. He also mentioned that the testing window shrunk from three weeks to two weeks, and that the state returns the test results too late in the year to be useful for the students who were recently tested. With that being said, Ed commented further on evaluating students, teachers, and administrators based on a single test metric: “these practices are outdated and contrary to quality management.” He concluded “it does not matter if the state selected ACT, SAT, NWEA or NAEP, just as long as it picked one and stuck with it.”

**Increased Responsibility for Student Testing**

As Ed spoke on his school’s testing program, he shared that his school has developed an in-house testing program. The program uses a system called “I ready” which has three diagnostics to monitor student abilities. He noted the “I ready” system is used in conjunction with the PSAT for eighth graders and is administered twice a year. He went on to say “we spend a great deal of time making sure those experiences come off and try to work with kid apathy… how do we create a situation where the kid, the young person’s willing to give his or her best effort.”

As Ed continued to talk you could hear in his voice a sense of pride as he shared that this year some 60 teachers from across his district came together and identified indicators, based on their district data. Next, they aligned their professional development to train the teachers on specific measures and methodologies needed to achieve the desired outcome. Teachers are
involved in a two-prong approach: the first approach is working on student relationships, while the second is working on closing the achievement gaps in the student body.

**Increased Responsibility for Teacher Evaluations**

Ed added he is responsible for evaluating 30 teachers per year, while his assistant principal is responsible for evaluating five. A percentage of ELA and Math student achievement scores are factored into all teacher evaluations. Additionally, the district has selected the 5D Plus evaluation model approved by the Michigan Department of Education as the tool by which to evaluate teachers. When Ed began to discuss the process, his school uses for evaluating teachers, that goes above and beyond the 5D Plus model, a sense of pride emerged. Ed went on to lay out the steps. First, teachers complete a self-assessment and a growth plan, which also includes their two goals regarding student performance in math and ELA. Next there are also two goals for their professional learning community, based on district indicators. He indicated this process brings about better outcomes for students and is more focused for teachers. He also believes that a running record created in Google documents helps support the program and has a positive effect on teacher evaluations. In short, there is increased responsibility regarding teacher evaluation.

**Increased Responsibility for Principal Evaluation**

Ed reflected the district uses Achieve, which is recommended by the State Department of Education to evaluate administrators. With that being said, he claims that there has been a significant increase in responsibility because legislatively all of their evaluations are directly tied to student growth. He noted “I don’t think that it is necessarily a bad thing. I think it is a good thing. I think it is a good thing if the equation is fair and neutrality understood.”
Experiences with Significant Stress

Ed commented when he is stressed, like most people he loses flexibility and does not interact as well with students giving out a negative aura. He says when this happens students often ask him what is wrong. He continued when he is stressed, he is less likely to attend social gatherings. Next Ed recalled being a smoker, and when he became more stressed, he smoked more. He concluded if he wanted to be around for his wife and kids, he needed to change his behavior. According to Ed when he is really stressed, he may tend to have a drink during the week rather than just on the weekend. “During these times, my best friend, my wife, usually tightens me up and that causes me to change my behavior rather quickly.”

Ed made several comments about social media, especially Facebook, saying it is a conundrum for the building principal; it has become the new slam book, gateway for bullying, fighting, sexting and a more effective way to be bad. On the other hand, Ed views social media as a more effective way to communicate; newspapers, and radio are hit and miss in his community. “Everyone has access to some form of social media.”

Coping Strategies Frequently Used

When asked about what coping mechanisms, he most frequently used for managing stress, Ed mentioned reading, walking, meditating, and spending time with his wife, noting “There are different things I use to center myself.” Ed mentioned he loves to read a variety of material: religion, philosophy, mysteries and science fiction.

Coping Preference Scale Findings

Ed responded to the Coping Preference Scale by selecting six activities he is most frequently going to use as a form of coping: (1) set realistic goals, (2) maintain a sense of humor, (3) prioritize, (4) use my time management techniques (i.e., management by objectives, setup
blocks of time for specific activities, etc.), (5) talk with family and friends, and (6) approach problems optimistically and objectively. In referenced to those coping skills used least frequently, Ed did not pick any from the lowest category of almost never. He picked “sometimes” for nine activities he engages in sporadically: (1) delegate responsibility, (2) withdraw physically from a situation (leave the office), (3) maintain good health habits, (e.g., watch weight, (4) eat balanced meals, (5) reduce intake of caffeine and refined sugars, keep proper concentrations of vitamins etc.), (6) break from daily routine or temporarily change to a less stressful task, (7) regular physical exercise, (8) using relaxation and stress management techniques, and (9) compartmentalize work and non-work.

Table 4

*Ed’s Coping Preference Scale Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set realistic goals</td>
<td>Delegate responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain sense of humor</td>
<td>Withdraw, physically leave the building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritize</td>
<td>Maintain good health habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize time management techniques (i.e., management by objectives, setup blocks of time for specific activities, etc.)</td>
<td>Eat balanced meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk with family and friends</td>
<td>Reduce intake of caffeine and refined sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach problems optimistically and objectively</td>
<td>Take a break from daily routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regular physical exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using relaxation and stress management techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compartmentalize work and non-work</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Frank

Frank is a 16 year experienced educator who has earned a bachelor’s, master’s, and educational specialist degree from various universities across the country. He has worked as an
elementary teacher and is currently a middle school principal; he works in a school that does not meet the minimum requirements to be considered for a school-wide Title 1 program.

**Increased Responsibilities for Federal and State Programs**

Frank says that his school district is unique, in that, the superintendent and central office work hard to create a positive, healthy school culture. He was pleased with the relationship and the teamwork that exists among the superintendent, central office, and building administrators. Frank credits this working relationship as a prime factor in his ability to share his increased workload. Frank acknowledged that, “Although there has been an increase in state and federal mandates, my day-to-day responsibilities with staff and students have not significantly increased.” He notes:

I am fortunate to work in a district that has developed a culture that integrates the federal programs into one seamless educational program in the sense that school improvement and other special programs have become part of the culture and are not handled in isolation.

He expanded the conversation by saying, that:

Our central office takes care of a lot of the Title work, whether it is teacher professional development, or administrative professional development. I work in conjunction with our special education director about homebound services and homeless students.

Given the important role that central office plays with respect to state and federal mandates Frank is able to spend more of his time on developing relationships with his staff and students. This is in itself, is an increase in responsibilities.
Increased Responsibilities for Student Testing

In regard to student testing, Frank credits teamwork as a way of dealing with the mandates and he does not personally manage the state assessments. However, he does orchestrate the process and is held accountable for the results. Furthermore, he acknowledges that he works with his assistant principal on what classes, what testing window, specific times, and what online services his students and staff will need to satisfy the state testing requirements. He noted that his school has a highly specialized population of students who have unique needs which must be met in order to satisfy federal and state special education testing requirements. In this context, Frank is proud of his team of teachers and administrators, and he viewed their teamwork as a reflection of the teamwork modeled by the superintendent, central office and his office.

Increased Responsibilities for Teacher Evaluations

Frank’s district uses the 5D Plus Teacher Evaluation Model, one of the evaluation tools approved by the state, which has helped the school district to create a healthy school culture. Teachers and administrators must be trained in the application of this model before being allowed (licensed) to use it. This additional step has helped to increase the instructional dialogue in his building.

Frank expressed that an increase in the reliance on technology has been beneficial and assists in teacher evaluations; this has helped in the reduction of his and teachers’ stress. He noted, “It is important for me to know as much as I can about my educators, for me to assist in their growth and development, which impacts my students.”

Frank commented further that the state mandates for teacher evaluations are handled differently in his district whereby administrators here perform more observations than is
required. Also there is a feedback loop included that consists of formal written documents, handwritten notes, voice messages, e-mails, and face-to-face conversations. Thus, he believes that the feedback loop is one of the key elements in teacher evaluation and allows teachers to be involved with the creation of formative and summative assessments. Overall, the use of the 5D Plus evaluation tool, along with the increased use of technology, has indeed increased this principal’s responsibility.

**Increased Responsibilities for Principal Evaluation**

Frank mentioned that he has continued the culture of feedback that was started by his predecessor, and this is an integral part of his principal evaluation process. Frank noted, “the district uses the Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA) School Advance system approved by the Michigan Department of Education to evaluate principals.” However, it should be noted that this evaluation also includes a 360-degree evaluation. This process begins when Frank evaluates himself and then, his superiors, teachers and support staff evaluate him. Thus, Franks’ evaluation is the aggregate profile gained from collecting and disaggregating data from the stakeholders. He acknowledges that the 360-degree evaluation process increases his workload and responsibility. However, he appears proud of this process and identifies it as an example of building community and his leadership.

**Experiences with Significant Stress**

Frank expressed that he wrestles with being “all in” that is singularly focused when he is with his family and “all in” when he is at work; he has problems compartmentalizing his family life and his work life. He reflected when he goes to the doctor and school is in session, he inevitably has high blood pressure; conversely, when he goes to the doctor and school is not in session, he does not have high blood pressure. Furthermore, recalling his first year as principal,
he experienced some health problems, which he attributes to the stress that came with being a first-year principal.

In sum, Frank shared that although additional responsibilities have increased over the years, he claims that his greatest stressor comes from his efforts to always give his teachers and students what he believes they need to learn, grow, and improve. “My biggest stressor is am I supporting my teachers in the best way possible with their professional development and growth?”

**Coping Skills Frequently Used**

Frank reflected when dealing with stressful situations he has a plethora of coping strategies available to use, one of which is that he is an avid reader and works to maintain balance in his family and work life. Hence, he is also active in local, regional, and state principal associations. Additionally, he has identified some mentors who he calls on from time to time. While at school, after having participated in difficult conversations, he may often choose to (1) sit in the choir or band room, (2) read scriptures, or (3) reflect upon words of wisdom and encouragement, in order to make sure he does not carry negative thoughts into his next conversation. He stated that he does not listen to music nor return calls on the way home from work. Furthermore, when at home and it is dinner time, he turns off electronic devices so he can focus on being with his family.

According to Frank, he is a processor and needs time to process information. Thus, on a typical day, he gets up early in the morning for exercise and arrives to work early where he plans his daily schedule. Since he is alone in the building, walking in the quiet of the morning is therapeutic and helps with anxiety and stress reduction. Subsequently, the quiet time in the morning is the time he also uses to process what happened yesterday and to develop a plan for
managing the most pressing issues of today. By the time the teachers arrive, he has reenergized and found his balance. Therefore, Frank views his quiet time as invaluable.

**Coping Preference Scale Findings**

Frank selected 10 categories as activities that he most frequently uses on the Coping Preference Scale. Those categories are: (1) maintain a sense of humor, (2) practice good human relations skills, (3) work harder in evenings and weekends, (4) talk with family or close friends, (5) maintain regular sleep habits, (6) regular physical exercise, (7) seek solitude, (8) slow down workplace time to reflect, (9) utilize in-service opportunities to increase management, and (10) communication skills. The coping skills Frank selected are consistent with his interview where he mentioned working to maintain balance in his life.

In contrast, Frank selected three coping skills he was least likely to use: (1) withdrawing physically from a situation, (2) uses relaxation and stress management techniques, and (3) developing office procedures to screen visitors. It appears, based on the interview, and survey Franks scores are congruent with his belief that he continues to strive for balance in his life.

Table 5

**Frank’s Coping Preference Scale Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a sense of humor</td>
<td>Withdraw, physically leave the building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice good human relations</td>
<td>Use relaxation and stress management techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work harder evenings and weekends</td>
<td>Change building procedures to screen visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk with family and friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular sleep patterns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular physical exercise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek solitude, slow down workplace time to reflect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize in-service opportunities to increase management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
George

George has a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree and started his educational journey as a substitute teacher. That experience led George to become a teacher, assistant principal, and currently a middle school principal. He has gained 13 years of experience as an educator working in those various positions. George works in a district that has a school-wide Title 1 program.

**Increased Responsibility for Federal and State Programs**

George shared that each federal program has its own unique set of rules and regulations that schools are required to meet. Consequently, there has been an increase in responsibilities, and they place a drain on the principal’s time. He continued the conversation by sharing his frustration with the high turnover of administrators and teachers. As administrators and teachers leave the district, their leaving creates additional work for George as he attempts to comply with state and federal mandates. However, as the building principal, he does acknowledge the role the intermediate school district plays in helping him meet the federal and state mandates. Additionally, other teachers and new hires have been able to step up and ease his burden.

In summary George said, that “I take pride in making sure we do what is asked by our state, as well as the feds and I think we are on track to be successful in everything we do here in our building. I think we comply with everything that is requested of us to do. I just try to lead with integrity.”

**Increased Responsibility for Student Testing**

George has responsibility for a 5th through 8th grade building and given this particular grade configuration, and a two-week testing window, it is problematic. According to George, as the state of Michigan changed from the MEAP to the MSTEP, it simultaneously changed its testing window requiring that everyone must be tested in a two-week window. The areas tested
by the state are English Language Arts (ELA), math, science and social studies. Additionally, the district has created its own instructional program which is aligned with the Michigan Assessment Program (MAP) and it utilizes testing through North West Evaluation Association (NWEA). The district’s instructional program has created benchmarks to measure growth three times a year.

He acknowledged that meeting the myriad of state procedures presents his school with unique challenges. Staff are now going to a series of trainings at the intermediate school district to learn all of the nuances associated with testing. For example, George said, “You have to get out a ruler, a meter stick, and measure head to head. They can only be so many feet close to each other.” Thus, these requirements have indeed increased his responsibilities in the area of student testing.

**Increased Responsibilities for Teacher Evaluations**

George made an observation that hiring a new teacher is similar to signing a player to a million-dollar contract in professional sports. Thus, he must be concerned about getting the right teacher, for the right position, because that new hire has the responsibility for delivering curriculum and instruction to students. Moreover, George is responsible for evaluating that person at some point in time. He went on to discuss that during the evaluation process he has increased responsibility to be thorough, accurate, and just. He believes he must get it right. George said:

Our school board adopted the 5 Dimensions of Teacher Learning and Improvement (5D Plus) if you will, for the teacher evaluation process. The 5D Plus measures: student engagement, professional collaboration and communication, student assessment, curriculum and pedagogy, and culture and environment. So that list is supported by Michigan Department of Education.
While he acknowledges the increased responsibility in teacher evaluation, he believes that the 5D+ evaluation model is the correct tool to accurately assess a teacher’s performance.

**Increased Responsibilities for Principal Evaluation**

According to George when it comes to his principal’s evaluation, he does not put it high on a pedestal. Not that his evaluation is unimportant, but it is a matter that he is not terribly concerned about. However, he sees his evaluation as a direct result of his performance in the building, and it is connected to his teachers’ evaluations, and how his students perform on the state assessment. He went on to share that the Board of Education also chose the 5D Plus to evaluate him. In this connection he states,

I understand that I am evaluated based on the success or failure of my teachers, and our student body… so I set goals, I have to achieve my goals, and I have to make sure the student growth portion is there, from our teaching staff to our student population, because that directly impacts my evaluation as a leader.

Thus, it seems that while George says he does not put the principal’s evaluation on a pedestal, he sees himself as an instructional leader, who leads by example. Therefore, he establishes and achieves goals that are beneficial to his school especially to his students and staff and they reflect favorably upon him.

**Experiences with Significant Stress**

When George was asked about experiencing stress as a result of the federal and state mandates, George reflected, “yep you can say, honestly, there has been increased stress in all of those areas. I think that is fair for me to say in student testing the increased stress comes from making sure that we are setting up a design for our students that best meets their needs.” Moreover, when reviewing testing protocols, he holds meetings designed to address the students’
needs which involves creating a schedule, a quiet environment, sufficient number of computers, tablets, or Chromebooks, so that students can be tested in the same manner. All students have an option to use either paper and pencil or computer. Also, he created a small group environment for special education students, especially, if their IEP calls for small group. George concludes by acknowledging that there is stress because of the long list of things to do, and making sure that he is meeting the needs of students.

**Coping Skills Frequently Used**

When George was asked about coping with stress, he discussed a variety of subjects starting with activities he used personally to cope with stress and going to systems or structures that he used to help his staff cope with stress. He identified the following as activities he was most likely to use when dealing with stressful situations: exercise, playing sports, camping, seeking balance and taking a walk. He went on further to discuss when managing activities that had the potential to cause stress among his staff members he relied on effective communication as another coping mechanism he frequently uses. With that being said, George placed special emphasis on communication, calling it foundational. He talked about the importance and the increased reliance of technology by everyone in the district. He cited for example a demonstration of shared leadership with teachers who were responsible for maintaining the building and district social media platforms as an effort to improve communication in the building and the district.

Furthermore, he cited networking as another form of coping, going to principal meetings sponsored by the intermediate school district, having an opportunity to network with other principals, and participating in professional development opportunities is priceless. George also identified teaming as a strategy for coping, citing several examples, where teachers stepped up
and took the reins, leading different initiatives. He also gave credit to former principals and teachers who ardently gave of their time and energy to create a healthy school culture and climate.

**Coping Preference Scale Findings**

George selected five categories from the Coping Preference Scale as categories he most frequently uses: (1) delegate responsibility, (2) maintain regular sleeping patterns, (3) approach problems optimistically, (4) establish office procedures so that visitors are screened, and (5) utilize in-service opportunities to increase repertoire of management and communication. These five areas are consistent with the statements George made during the interview process. Conversely, George selected only one category indicating he was least likely to use that activity as a form of coping: withdraw physically from a situation (leave the office or school for a time). George indicated in the interview he does not like to miss work for any reason.

Table 6

*George’s Coping Preference Scale Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delegate responsibility</td>
<td>Withdraw, physically leave the building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain regular sleeping patterns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach problems optimistically</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish office procedures so</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>that visitors are screened</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilize in-service opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>to increase repertoire of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management and communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Harold**

Harold is a veteran educator with 33 years of experience as an elementary teacher, high school teacher, assistant principal, and middle school principal. He has earned a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree from universities within the state, and he leads a school with a school-wide Title 1 program.

**Increased Responsibility for Federal and State Programs**

Harold identified three programs that his school is eligible to receive federal and/or state funding: School Improvement, Special Education, and Title 1. He noted the School Improvement process is a good process, although it is a lot of work. He reflected his school also receives additional support from the intermediate school district and central office to support school improvement and special education. Two of his teachers’ co-chair, organize and run the school improvement meetings, which is a big help in keeping them on tract with all the requirements. One of his teachers is the Special Ed Coordinator for the district and she attends the meetings and brings him information that keeps them in compliance. As far as Title 1 is concerned, he noted,

I use to feel like we were just meeting the requirements just to get the funding, but now I think we are actually at the point where we do the requirements and they actually help us figure out what we should change and do it better too.

Harold suggested that the increased workload, involved with administering and monitoring the federal and state programs would become overwhelming without the additional support from the intermediate school district and central office.
Increased Responsibility for Student Testing

Harold shared a story that his teachers and administrators made a conscious decision to create one unified system. A couple of years ago their high school was under pressure to improve their students’ test scores. As a result of that pressure, the middle and elementary teachers banded together so the high school was not in this all alone; it was a problem for everyone. Consequently, their own instructional model was created which included unified testing starting with local assessments.

In this instance, they aligned their curriculum within each grade level. For example, fourth and fifth grade teachers try to give the same math assessment, four times a year, to make sure the students are progressing at the same pace for the next grade. Previously, students took the NWEA and MAP. His building is the only one in the district that tests every grade and every subject. He has two elementary grades in his building. One of the grades in his building is testing from the week of spring break until the last week of school. In this regard, Harold noted, “over testing our students is a great concern…(and) student testing is the number one stressor for teachers and administrators.”

Increased Responsibility for Teacher Evaluations

Harold noted, “Teacher evaluations have gone from 20% to 40% based on student achievement data.” Harold reminds his teachers that he is with them, and that whatever scores the students get, or the teachers get in their classrooms, he gets on his evaluation. Harold noted, “The same percentage used to evaluate teachers is used to evaluate me.” He believes that this helps form camaraderie among the staff. However, his teachers still worry about how much student achievement is figured into their evaluations.
Harold continued that, “student testing is the greatest stressor for teachers and teacher evaluation is a close second.” He expressed a concern that over the last 10 years, completing teacher evaluation has become very time consuming. He noted, “One of the requirements of the McREL evaluation system is that the principal conduct three full-hour long, classroom observations per year.” As a result, he said, “I’ve had some of my best collegial conversations with teachers that I’ve had in my career.”

**Increased Responsibility for Principal Evaluation**

Harold added that once the high school selected the McREL system to evaluate principals and teachers, the middle and elementary schools followed suit. This system is based on the Balanced Leadership Framework, which is based on a meta-analysis of the most effective teaching strategies used to ensure student learning. This evaluation tool includes goal setting, and it is long and tedious. However, Harold reflected, “I must say good conversations have come out of it.”

The most difficult part of the evaluation process is finding the time to do it diligently. He meets with the superintendent at the beginning, middle, and the end of the school year. Harold claims to have a good relationship with the superintendent who knows where he stands thus, he is not overly concerned about his evaluation. Harold said, “they will go to lunch and talk about his evaluation.” Also, the superintendent will identify areas that he wants him to work on to improve his performance.

**Experience with Significant Stress**

Harold noted, “it is very stressful come testing time, not just for me, and I’m cognizant of that, for my staff too.” He shared, “I have high blood pressure and I try and see my doctor at least twice a year, once when school is in, and once when school is out. It is inevitable my blood
pressure is always highest when school is in session.” Harold reflected he cannot seem to leave work at school; restless nights are normal for him, and he does not always get enough sleep. For him, as far as school is concerned, teacher evaluation is the second most stressful period and another stressor was when his son was deployed to Afghanistan.

Coping Strategies Most Frequently Used

Harold recalled using a variety of measures to cope with the stress of being a principal. For him, the first and most important coping measure is trust in his people. He tries to build a family atmosphere. Most of his staff members are veterans, which helps a lot because over time they have developed a healthy relationship built on mutual respect and trust. This relationship is beneficial to both parties as his teachers do not have a problem assisting him with his principal duties. His teachers are willing to meet with him outside of contractual hours. Additionally, his wife is an educator and he can talk to her about his work and job-related stress. Exercise is especially important to him and he walks his dog almost daily. According to Harold, teachers who knew him before he became a principal will come in and inquire about how he is doing, and he does not hesitate to ask for help. Also, his staff feels comfortable offering him help. He listens to music and likes to attend live concerts; seeing live concerts is his favorite way to relax.

Coping Preference Scale Summary

Harold responded to the Coping Preference Scale by selecting 8 activities he most frequently uses as a form of coping to manage job related stress: (1) delegate responsibility, (2) maintain a sense of humor, (3) engage in active non-work or play activities (e.g., camping, boating, golfing), (4) practice good human relations skills with stakeholders, (5) work harder including evenings and weekends, (6) engage in less active non-work or play activities (e.g., watch television, go out to dinner), (7) approach problems optimistically and objectively, and (8)
regular physical exercise. Conversely, he selected five activities that he is least likely to use when managing job-related stress: (1) leave the building to withdraw from the situation, (2) maintain regular sleep habits, (3) break from daily routine or temporarily change to a different less stressful task, (4) use relaxation and stress management techniques auto hypnosis and biofeedback, and (5) establish office procedures to limit visitor access. Harold’s responses on the coping Preference Scale were consistent with his responses to the interview questions

Table 7

Harold’s Coping Scale Preference Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delegate responsibility</td>
<td>Withdraw from the situation and leave the building temporarily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain sense of humor</td>
<td>Maintain regular sleep habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in active non-work or play activities</td>
<td>Break from daily routine or temporarily change to less stressful task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice good human relations skills</td>
<td>Use relaxation techniques and stress management techniques auto-hypnosis, biofeedback, yoga, meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work harder including evenings and weekends</td>
<td>Change office procedures to limit visitor access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in less active non-work or play activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach problems optimistically and objectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular physical exercise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ivan

Ivan has been an educator for 20 years, serving as an elementary teacher, elementary principal, middle school teacher, assistant principal, and middle school principal. He has earned bachelors, masters, and educational specialist’s and doctorate degrees from various universities across the country. Ivan works in a school that does not qualify as a school- wide Title 1 program.
**Increased Responsibility for Federal and State Programs**

Ivan discussed the external pressure principals incurred leading schools using the former federal Top to Bottom rating system, where the lower the schools score the greater the pressure to improve. He is aware there is currently legislation to install a new accreditation system, using A-F grades. At this writing, the legislation has passed the House, and is headed for the Senate, before traveling to the Governor’s Office for a signature, and becoming law. Ivan said, that “I am certain parents know what those grades mean, and it will be nerve wrecking for schools with moderate to lower grades to improve their grades.” This suggests that Ivan is keenly aware of the fact that pressure to improve means greater responsibilities for all principals working in the middle school environment, which includes him.

**Increased Responsibilities for Student Testing**

Regarding student testing, Ivan feels that testing has been a constant moving target. He is of the opinion that school teachers and administrators have to obviously administer the test, and prepare the kids through great teaching in the classroom. And if the teachers and administrators do that, he anticipates that the kids will perform well on the tests. Therefore, his staff spends time talking about the test, but he believes that the day- to- day instruction is the best preparation for a test, versus preparing for the test via other approaches. Ivan believes that “focusing on test preparation is not in the best interest of the students.” He believes, at best it is only a short term-solution.

**Increased Responsibilities for Teacher Evaluations**

Ivan expressed concern that teachers are fearful of certain aspects of their evaluation, and student growth is also a concern. This area is made more acute because they do not get their state
test results back until August. Further, he is concerned about the uncertainty of student achievement data being factored in as either 20% or 40% of the teachers’ evaluations.

This uncertainty causes additional stress. Ivan noted, “when he first came to the school there was little trust between teachers and administration.” Some teachers believed that their evaluation had taken on an “I gotcha,” quality. Ivan noted, “in order to counter those negative thoughts, he has been very intentional with his expectations, assessments, processes, and communication. They have timelines well in advance, so they have a list of things that they need to do for evaluation” and as the instructional leader he is supportive of quality education.

**Increased Responsibilities for Principal Evaluation**

Ivan admitted that, “there’s certainly that fear, though, that exists, whether it be with principals or with teachers, that this evaluation is in large part of how my kids are going to perform on the state assessment.” His district uses the School Advance Evaluation tool approved by the Michigan Department of Education to evaluate administrators. However, as the building principal, he is not overly concerned about his evaluation. He believes in the process and has intentionally communicated with his superiors and subordinates his goals and outcomes for the year. He believes he has developed a healthy school culture, a supportive climate based on trust, respect, and honest communication.

**Experiences with Significant Stress**

Ivan explained that most of his stress is self-induced. He sees himself as being very well organized and sets goals for everyone. Ivan noted “each student makes two goals for the year, one per semester.” He attempts to call each student’s parents and discuss the student’s goal sheet. Ivan noted, “Finding time to complete this task has been hard.” Thus, his level of stress has
peaked. He also reflected that although he downplays the amount of stress, he admitted that the amount of stress he experiences keeps him from completing physical exercises daily.

**Coping Skills Frequently Used**

Ivan discussed that the drive to and from work as a time he uses to de-stress. Also, he noted he “deliberately does very little schoolwork on the weekends.” He has instructed the other members of the administrative team to refrain from contacting staff on the weekend. Ivan focuses on spending time with his family and he wants the staff to do the same. He expressed that he has learned how to compartmentalize his work Monday through Friday. As far as coping with other accountability - related matters, he makes lists and focuses on his communication with his staff.

**Coping Preference Scale Findings**

Ivan selected three items on the Coping Preference Scale as activities he most frequently uses as coping skills: (1) set realistic goals, (2) practice good human relations skills with staff, students, and parents, and (3) prioritize and use time management techniques. Conversely, Ivan selected four coping skills activities he is least likely to use as a coping strategy: (1) withdraw physically from a situation (leave the office or school for a time), (2) use relaxation and stress management techniques (e.g., auto-hypnosis, biofeedback, meditations, yoga, etc.), (3) establish office procedures so that visitors are screened (limit open door policy), and (4) socializing (e.g., lunch with others, playing cards etc.). Ivan’s items selected are consistent with the answers he gave during the interview.
Table 8

Ivan’s Coping Preference Scale Summaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set realistic goals</td>
<td>Withdraw, physically leave the building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice good human relationship skills with staff, students, and parents</td>
<td>Use relaxation techniques (e.g., hypnosis, biofeedback, meditation, yoga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritize and use time management</td>
<td>Establish office procedures to limit visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socializing at lunch, playing card games</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**John**

John is a 13 year veteran educator having worked as an elementary and high school teacher. He also worked in high school and middle school as an administrator. He graduated from two different state universities with a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree, and currently leads a school identified as a school-wide Title 1 program.

**Increased Responsibility for State and Federal Programs**

John made it clear that, when it comes to state and federal mandates, his school-wide Title 1 program faced an arduous task of improving his school. Arguably, this meant that there would be an increase in his responsibilities as an administrator. His school was classified as a Priority School, which means it was in the lowest five percent in the state. Which also meant there was an increase in John’s responsibilities, thus he worked with the local intermediate school district, MDE, School Improvement Network, Central Office, school administrators, teachers, and parents to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan.

According to John, the School Improvement Facilitators’ Network in conjunction with the intermediate school district sponsored a data retreat, which continues to keep that plan in front of them. Thus, he noted they are achieving their goals and having high impact on student achievement. John commented that central office takes care of many of the issues related to Title
1, while his administrative team takes care of everything else. In short, given John’s explanation of the unique situation involving his school, there is little or no doubt that his responsibilities increased as a result of the state and federal mandates.

**Increased Responsibility for Student Testing**

John acknowledged that there is a lot of work that goes into setting up for the test. He stated, “It is a highly monitored testing environment and so you want to make sure it’s implemented with fidelity, without any irregularities.” He perceives the length of the test is probably the biggest concern; it is stressful on teachers and students as well as to be able to test for several hours and a number of days. In this context John stated that,

You try to build stamina in testing throughout the school year and to try to identify growth over time. So, we have other assessments that we do, whether it’s unit assessments or end of NWA assessments. We have identified targets for the students trying to get them ready for high school.

Here, John’s description of the testing situation paints a clear picture of the increase in his responsibilities in his role as principal.

**Increased Responsibility for Teacher Evaluations**

John noted:

Teacher evaluations are always a stressful time. We have over 60 teachers, each has to have a pre-inquiry, four to six classroom observations for 20 minutes, a mid-year inquiry and a final evaluation with a grade that has to be submitted to Human Resources in the State of Michigan. Additionally, conversations can be very uncomfortable with teachers who score minimally effective or ineffective.
John mentioned that he shares responsibility for teacher evaluation with other building administrators, which can be problematic for both the teacher as well as the administrator. Some teachers may feel that if a different administrator evaluates them, they will get a different score. Problematic in that Teacher A does not care to be evaluated by Administrator B also, problematic in the sense Teacher B does not care to evaluated by Administrator A. John believes that the combination of working with 5D Plus Teacher Evaluation Model, in conjunction with the School Improvement Facilitators Network, has prepared his administrators well, and minimizes subjectivity in teacher evaluation.

**Increased Responsibility for Principal Evaluation**

John’s district uses ACHIEVE recommended by the Michigan Department of Education, for the evaluation of school administrators. He did not feel any increased responsibility with respect to principal evaluation. John commented that, “I have not felt stressed over principal evaluations, because I’m of the mindset that if you do the things that you are asked to do that you will be successful.” Subsequently, this section of the interview was very brief.

**Experience with Significant Stress**

John finds it is stressful working with students who have behavioral problems and come to school with mental health issues, and with those students with law enforcement involvement, and other related home issues that make it difficult for them to focus and learn. He admits that “How we manage them throughout the year can be stressful… there are some strained relationships when students aren’t performing to the best of their abilities, when teachers aren’t performing to their best abilities.” John indicated the greatest amount of stress comes when he is working under a label identifying his school as a failing school. He ends this section by saying, “No one wants to be perceived as failing, knowing the hard work and effort that goes into it.”
**Coping Strategies Frequently Used**

Upon reflection, John noted, he subscribes to the motto, “We’re all in this together…(and) as a leader I try to unite our staff so that we share responsibility and that collectively we are strong. We support and encourage one another.” There are things he does routinely to maintain his balance. He takes walks, calls others for advice, delegates, stays focused on the goals, uses humor, and does not take himself too seriously. He intentionally takes time to unwind by spending quality time with his family and friends, reading, and just relaxing.

**Coping Preference Scale Findings**

In reviewing John’s responses to the Coping Preference Scale, it is interesting to note that John selected eight activities he most frequently uses as coping skills, namely: (1) setting realistic goals, (2) delegating responsibility, (3) practicing good human relations skills with staff, students, and parents, (4) talking with family members or close friends, (5) maintaining good sleep habits, (6) approach problems optimistically and objectively, (7) socializing, and (8) utilizing in service opportunities to increase repertoire of management and communication skill. These were all areas consistent with John’s interview; John remarked he works to develop trust and a sense of being one among his teachers and staff.

Conversely, coping activities John is least likely to engage in are: (1) work harder (including weekends and evenings), (2) maintain good healthy habits, and (3) watching weight, eat balanced mills, reduce intake of caffeine, refined sugars and keep proper concentrations of vitamins. This area is also consistent with the interview John reflected he spends extra time at work and includes his family in school related functions whenever possible. However, the best example is that John worked over Christmas break. In fact John cleared time to interview me; I was his second interview scheduled over Christmas break.
Table 9

*John’s Coping Scale Preference Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting realistic goals</td>
<td>Work harder evenings and weekends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegating responsibility</td>
<td>Maintain good health habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice good human relations with stakeholders</td>
<td>Watch weight, eat balanced meals, less sugar and caffeine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with family and friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining regular sleep patterns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach problems optimistically and objectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socializing at lunch playing cards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize in services work on management skills and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Leon**

Leon is a veteran educator who has 21 years of experience as a middle school teacher, assistant principal, and middle school principal. Moreover, he has earned multiple degrees, a Bachelor of Science, a Master of Arts, an educational specialist from several universities within the state. Leon works in a school building that does not have a Title1 program.

**Increased Responsibilities for Federal and State Programs**

Leon is a principal in a school district that has a Title 1 program in the elementary school, but not in the middle school. However, he does receive 31A At-Risk funding and most of the responsibility for implementing it is handled by his guidance counselor and supported from the central office. He expressed frustration with the amount of turnover in the superintendent’s position, central office, and teaching ranks. This constant turnover, among other things, has given him additional responsibilities to make sure the needs of his staff are addressed. Leon claims that he is more of a facilitator and that he has taken on additional responsibilities for
example serving on a District Emergency Operations Team charged with overseeing school safety.

**Increased Responsibilities for Student Testing**

Leon has a lot of responsibility for overseeing student testing, and he has a supportive team of teachers, support staff, and administrators responsible for the day-to-day testing.

According to him, the key to managing a successful testing program is shared responsibility.

That said, however, he also shared some frustration with the state, as the testing program is seen as a constantly moving target. In addition to changing from MEAP to MSTEP, the state switched from the ACT test to the PSAT; because the tests measure different things, he is expecting the test to be difficult for his students. Henceforth, this first test will be used to establish baseline data and he expects lower test scores.

Leon reflected apathy, on the part of some students and parents, is part of the problem and there is not as much emphasis on the test as in prior years. He noted is not the case with the superintendent and Board of Education. Additionally, his building was selected to participate in the National Association of Education Program test, which is coordinated by the federal government. Leon reflected his biggest concern is making sure all of the nuance rules and regulations are followed, regardless of which test is given.

**Increased Responsibility for Teacher Evaluations**

Leon noted he shares responsibility for teacher evaluation with his assistant principal. He is responsible for completing 65% of the evaluations and his assistant principal is responsible for the remaining 35%. As the system is designed, the principal and assistant principal talk frequently about teacher evaluations. Leon continued saying his school uses The Thoughtful Classroom, one of the evaluation tools recommended by the Michigan Department of Education.
There are 28 teachers in his building and there are teachers on the 1 to 4 spectra: (1) highly effective, (2) effective, (3) minimally effective, and (4) ineffective. Ideally, his goal is to have everyone rated as a three effective or four highly effective; realistically there have been teachers rated with scores less than three. He reflected when that occurs there are difficult conversations that must take place.

Leon reflected that he is a relationship-centered person and has worked to create a culture built on trust, respect, and open communication; teacher evaluations are developed based on this foundation. As a result, teacher evaluations are not seen as “I got you moments.” He noted, “Occasionally there have been teachers who were not good fits for the district, difficult conversations occurred, and those teachers have left the district.”

**Increased Responsibility for Principal Evaluation**

Leon expressed that; he is not overly concerned with his evaluation because he has a healthy relationship with the superintendent. He said, “the district uses the Advance Principal Evaluation System approved by the Michigan Department of Education.” His evaluation is connected to the teacher’s evaluation, which is connected to the students’ achievement on state assessments. However, he shared that one data point or test score does not tell the full story of what goes on in schools. Leon concluded that, he is in constant communication with the superintendent and has already begun working on specific goals to enhance the existing positive perception of his school.

**Experiences with Significant Stress**

Leon says “staff turnover is one area that is stressful for him.” The number of different areas affected by turnover impacts the entire district. For example, the district is experiencing a
turnover in the superintendent office again; and each superintendent has his or her own agenda. A new superintendent means a change in the direction of the school system.

He says that the district also has lost central office workers, teachers, and support staff; and school board members have not been immune. Leon also expressed frustration with students abusing social media. He noted “it is especially frustrating knowing the students lied about their age in order to get an account in the first place. It is even more frustrating when the parents find out the students lied and still support their children.” In sum, coping with these important matters is stressful for this middle school principal.

**Coping Skills Most Frequently Used**

Leon continued the conversation saying when it comes to coping with stressful situations he likes to laugh and often finds humor in different things that students get involved with. He also talked about the importance of developing positive relations among teachers and support staff, as being a coping mechanism. He also uses delegation as a form of coping and empowering others to do their job. Along the same vein, he talked about developing a working relationship with other principals in the area. He enjoys participating in professional development activities organized by the intermediate school district. Leon noted he puts family first. In fact, he noted, “If he cannot take care of his family how can he take care of other people children.”

**Coping Preference Scale Findings**

Leon identified two areas that, he is most likely to use on the Coping Preference Scale: (1) humor and (2) compartmentalizing work and non-work life. The responses Leon identified are consistent with his comments made during the interview. He talked about often seeing humorous things when working with adolescents. Leon also shared his mantra, which is “family first.” Conversely, he selected an activity as one that he is least likely to use on the Coping
Preference Scale, namely: seek solitude, slow down workplace, and take time to reflect. This response is also consistent with what he reflected during our interview.

Coping Preference Scale Summary

Table 10

*Leon’s Coping Preference Scale Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain sense of humor</td>
<td>Seek solitude, slow down workplace, take time to reflect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compartmentalize work and non-work life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bob**

Bob is a seasoned educator with 13 years of experience gained from working as an elementary teacher, assistant principal, elementary principal, and middle school principal. Bob has multiple degrees having earned a bachelor’s degree, a master’s degree, and a doctorate degree from different universities within the state. Bob works in a school that does not qualify for Title 1 funding.

**Increased Responsibility for Federal and State Programs**

Bob shared that his building does not qualify for Title 1 funding, as his building has only an 8% free and reduced lunch count. Thus, his district could be considered as affluent. However, he noted, “Even though only 8% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch, those students who qualify really need additional support.” With the lost days due to inclement weather, he worries that some of his students would not have enough food to eat. In that context, all students at his school are all treated equally regardless of income. The philosophy of his school is we will do what is in the best interest of all students. Hence, it is interesting to note that Bob shared he has not experienced any increased responsibilities for federal and state mandates.
In fact, when he hears of Title 1 and similar programs, he thinks what is in the best interest of all students in the building regardless of income. Bob shared that the increase in responsibility for him comes in the form of making sure his most vulnerable population of students’ needs are addressed.

**Increased Responsibilities for Student Testing**

Bob added that, not unlike his response regarding state and federal mandates, he did not have any increased responsibility for student testing in the traditional sense. As the building leader, he is responsible for making sure all the students are prepared to participate in the state assessment. He has a team that works together to make sure all the minute details of the state test are completed with fidelity to ensure that special needs students, and ESL students, are all appropriately addressed. One of his daily tasks is to work with the teachers to ensure that all the students had been focusing on the right work.

Interestingly, Bob identified finding the right work for students as good stress. Good stress as defined in the stress literature is known as eustress. According to Bob, if the teachers and administrators have done their jobs effectively, he was confident that the students would perform effectively on the state assessment. The increased responsibility for Bob appears to come in the form of creating a positive, supportive environment for all students, regardless of household income and holding everyone accountable including himself for finding the right work for students.

**Increased Responsibility for Teacher Evaluations**

Bob reported that he is responsible for evaluating 16 teachers using the Marzano Framework, selected by the district. This is one of the evaluation models approved by the Michigan Department of Education. He cautions his staff not to get hung up on teacher ratings,
because it causes undue stress trying to discern who is highly effective, effective, minimally effective, or ineffective. Bob noted the state assessment is an important data point; however, he factors in the social emotional well-being of the children as an area to measure student growth. He also mentioned the social emotional well-being of children is also factored into the school improvement process. Bob made these statements with a sense of pride.

**Increased Responsibility for Principal Evaluation**

Bob expressed that his district uses the Marzano Focused Teacher Evaluation model as the instrument to evaluate teachers, as well as the Marzano School Leadership Framework for the evaluation of principals, and the Marzano District Leadership Framework for the evaluation of Superintendents. One of the qualities of the Marzano Framework is a common language among teachers, principals, and superintendent’s evaluation tools. He noted “truthfully” his real evaluation comes from the smiles he sees on his students’ faces. If his students are not smiling, he is not being effective. Bob meets with the superintendent twice a year to discuss his evaluation and noted he does not worry about being highly effective or effective. He is confident that if he is not doing something correctly, his superintendent will let him know. Thus, he wants his teachers to try not to get stressed out over where they are on the evaluation continuum, namely, highly effective, effective, minimally effective, and ineffective. He is aware that those are labels created by an outside entity, but, “the real evaluation comes daily based on the relationships with children, when you see the smiles on their faces, you know you are being effective.”

**Experiences with Significant Stress**

Bob noted that, he has been in education for 13 years and that he has been an administrator for six years as a principal in elementary and middle school. Thus, he has observed
a wide variety of unique situations and he is neither surprised by what he sees, nor is he overly stressed over things that happen at school. He shared that; he is far less stressed today in comparison to his first years as a principal.

Bob shared a story about being in college and working as an intern in business. He noted, “There were nights when he could not sleep, because he was so focused on making money.” Furthermore, the stress he experienced in that internship was far greater than the stress he has experienced in education. Bob shared, m. he stresses over a kid in crisis and not being able to get that kid what he or she needs. Bob repeated the story about because of the Polar Vortex, there were students who may not have eaten, when school was not in session. Bob reflected he is concerned about every student, and he does not want to lose one!

Bob says that he stresses over a variety of work related issues for example: not meeting deadlines, if he is using the coaching model effectively with his staff, and whether he is able to fully meet their needs of his staff. Bob noted his staff can tell when he is stressed; he may walk faster, and his use of sarcasm becomes more frequent. Bob laughed and noted ironically, his doctor is mystified over the fact he has come down with pneumonia on more than one occasion while working in the middle school. Bob noted he had to figure out how not to get pneumonia with a smile.

Coping Skills Frequently Used

Bob spoke confidently about the strategies he frequently uses to cope with stress and he has developed a wide range of coping skills, namely; positive mental attitude, maintains a sense of humor, use a team approach, delegate appropriately, empower people to make a decision, give them the tools and support, remove barriers, get out of the way, rely on his network, use
technology, and not afraid to ask for help. It is quite apparent when talking with Bob that he has excellent coping skills.

**Coping Preference Scale Findings**

Bob selected items from the Coping Preference Scale he most likely uses as coping skills, namely: (1) delegate responsibility, (2) maintaining a sense of humor, and (3) approaching things optimistically. Conversely, there were eight areas he selected as coping skills he was least likely to use: (1) withdraw from the situation and leave the building, (2) talking with family and friends, (3) working harder in the evenings and on weekends, (4) break the daily routine and change to a less stressful task, (5) community involvement, (6) use stress management and relaxation techniques, (7) create more positive and self-supportive mental sets, and (8) utilize in-service opportunities to increase repertoire of management and communication skills. Bob’s selections on the Coping Preference Scale were consistent with the answers he gave during the interview.

Table 11

**Bob’s Coping Preference Scale Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delegate responsibility</td>
<td>Withdraw physically leave the building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a sense of humor</td>
<td>Talk with family and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach problems optimistically and objectively</td>
<td>Working harder in the evenings and weekends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talk with family &amp; friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Break from daily routine change to a less stressful task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use relaxation &amp; stress management techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create more positive &amp; self-supportive mental sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utilize in-service opportunities to increase repertoire of management &amp; communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kevin

Kevin is a veteran educator with 30 years of experience gained from working as a classroom teacher, and currently a middle school principal. He has a Bachelor of Science degree, and masters of arts degree from institutions of higher learning within the state. The building where Kevin works does not receive Title 1 services. He leads a school with a total enrollment of about 250 students.

**Increased Responsibilities for Federal and State Programs**

Kevin reported that in his school district Title 1 funds are distributed only to the elementary school. However, his middle school’s student free and reduced lunch count is 175 out of 250 or 70% of the total student population. The middle school receives 31A, special education, and school improvement funds. He believes that the high poverty rate has a negative impact on the student population as more middle school students are stressed out today than were stressed out in past years. Consequently, he spends half of his day as a counselor working with students. The other half of the day he works as an administrator. Kevin noted, “The superintendent, curriculum director, counselor, and teacher leaders have taken on the additional responsibility of leading the 31A, special education, and school improvement programs.”

Subsequently, he noted there are increased expectations from the school board that his school must either compete academically or outperform other school districts in the region. Thus he believes that additional pressure comes from a desire to enhance the reputation of the school and increase the number of school of choice students who transfer into the district, as well as reduce the number of his students who may want to transfer out of the district via school of choice. Kevin believes that the superintendent, curriculum director, administrators, counselor, and
teachers working together have created a positive school culture. In sum, Kevin did not voice that he has received much increased responsibility for implementing federal and state programs.

**Increased Responsibility for Student Testing**

Kevin added that the superintendent, curriculum director, half time counselor and lead teachers manage the state regulations for testing. Hence, this working arrangement allows him to concentrate on managing the day-to-day operations of the school. Furthermore, he identified working with apathetic students as a stressor. He believes that his students do not see the importance, or relevancy of state testing. Thus, how students perform on the state test is a major concern of the teaching staff and school board; Kevin says that he believes testing is the number one stressor for teachers. Whereas the superintendent, curriculum director, counselor and lead teachers have increased responsibility for student testing, the building principal, Kevin, does not have any major increased responsibility for student testing.

**Increased Responsibility for Teacher Evaluations**

Kevin expressed that he hired 10 of the 13 teachers in the building and he is responsible for evaluating all of them. Additionally, the district uses the 5D Plus teacher evaluation model approved by the State Board of Education. Contextually, when the district first began to use the 5D Plus teacher evaluation tool the learning curve was steep; learning how to use it effectively and efficiently was difficult. Thus, Kevin says he has had to adjust the time he spends conducting observations between working with veteran teachers and new teachers. He noted “I will do my observations for my newest teachers. I will meet the letter of the law.” Kevin says one reality of working in a small district that he has frequent conversations with the superintendent. One of those conversations focused on evaluation of teachers.
Kevin says the superintendent agrees with his assessment of his veteran staff and they are comfortable with the degree of competency of his veteran teachers. Consequently, he will spend less time observing veteran teachers and more time observing new teachers. Therefore, it appears Kevin has additional responsibility for teacher evaluation.

Kevin shared that he struggles with dividing his time between being an instructional leader, disciplinarian, and counselor. Subsequently, he has developed principal passes for students who need to talk with him. If a student does not feel safe, or the student hears about another student who is talking about hurting himself, herself, or someone else, and reports it to an adult, seeing that person becomes the priority. Furthermore, his teachers do a good job of handling social media, identifying students who bully and catching students vaping.

**Increased Responsibility for Principal Evaluation**

Kevin mentioned that he is not overly concerned with his principal’s evaluation, and the district has adopted the Advance Evaluation System approved by the State Department of Education for principal evaluations. Hence, he is keenly aware that a portion of the composite score on his evaluation is derived from his students’ performance on the state assessment. Kevin says that he has a good relationship with the superintendent, and they meet 1:1 whenever there is a board of education meeting. Also, if he was having problems, he is certain the superintendent would let him know and he would make the necessary corrections. Contextually, he believes that things are operating effectively now. For example, the superintendent recently asked him if he would delay his retirement for at least one more year. The superintendent believes the stability in the middle school is in the district’s best interest.

Kevin noted that he practices a 360 degree evaluation in that not only does the superintendent evaluate him, but he has teachers evaluate him by completing a trust survey that
asked three questions: (1) What should I keep on doing? (2) What should I stop doing? and (3) What should I start doing? He also evaluates himself. Furthermore, his building has received very few parent complaints, and he meets with a newly formed parent’s teacher organization designed only for middle school parents. Moreover, he has formed a new partnership with a local community church group. Based on the feedback from the superintendent, teachers, and parents Kevin is not threatened by the evaluation process. However, he does have increased responsibility for the principal evaluation.

**Experiences with Significant Stress**

Kevin continued that everything associated with his job is stressful and there are different degrees of stress. One of the areas where he identified stress is in his inability to leave work at work. As Kevin compared other jobs he had worked to the principal’s job, he concluded the principal’s job was the most stressful job he had held, saying that “you take the job home with you more as an administrator.” The job is mentally draining.

He also discussed the job as a principal had a negative impact on his relationship with his family. For example, he claims that he has more patience with his students than he did with his children. Thus, he was not surprised that when he goes to the doctor and school is in session he has high blood pressure, and when he goes to the doctor in the summer when school is not in session, he does not have high blood pressure. In fact, Kevin reflected according to his wife he in the summer he is a different person. Kevin noted, he has worked hard at trying to develop balance both in his work life and home life. He noted when he first started as a principal, he was not adequately prepared for the stress that comes along with being a lead administrator.
Coping Skills Frequently Used

Kevin says he is a social butterfly thus it is not surprising that when he is feeling stress he talks with a member of the support staff member, secretary, cafeteria worker or custodian. It also is not surprising that Kevin goes observe students in a classroom when he is feeling stress. Kevin commented that when he has had a stressful day, he tries to get on the golf course as often as possible. He also recalled that he watches his children play sports whenever he needs to cope with stressful situations.

Kevin mentioned that a program called Michigan Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MIBLSI) helped transform the culture of his building. MIBLSI is designed to address students struggling academically with reading literacy. Prior to the program’s adoption in 2009, his building had averaged between 1500 and 2000 discipline referrals per year. Since that time, the discipline referrals dropped to 500 per year and now average about 250 discipline referrals per year. Kevin noted adopting MIBLSI helped change his role from fulltime principal, to part time principal and part time counselor. He says this change only occurred as a result of adopting MIBLSI and focusing on meeting the needs of the students. He sees MIBLSI as a form of coping. On a personal note Kevin credits MIBLSI with having a positive impact on his marriage and family. He reflected as the discipline referrals declined, he noticed the relationship between he and his wife and kids improved.

Coping Preference Scale Findings

Kevin believes maintain balance in his life is a key element to being an effective administrator. He noted managing stressful situations is part of the daily life of an administrator therefore when managing stressful situations he is most likely to use the following coping mechanisms: (1) maintain a sense of humor, (2) compartmentalize work and non-work life, (3)
talk with family and friends, (4) empowering others by developing a team and (5) building healthy relationships. Conversely, when it came to identifying coping skills Kevin was least likely to use when mitigating stressful situations Kevin identified seek solitude, slow down workplace, take time to reflect.

Table 12

Kevin’s Coping Preference Scale Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a sense of humor</td>
<td>Seek solitude, slow down workplace, and take time to reflect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compartmentalize work life and non-work life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk with family and friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering others by developing a team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building healthy relationships</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Calvin

Calvin is a 13-year veteran of education. He has worked as an elementary teacher, assistant principal and middle school principal. He has a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree. He works in a building that has a targeted Title 1 program.

Increased Responsibility for Federal and State Programs

At the time of this interview, Calvin shared he had just left a meeting with an auditor and part of the discussion was over his middle school becoming a Title 1 program school-wide next year. He noted，“attending these meetings was a lot of fun;” Sarcastically, he did not like going to these meetings because they took him out of the building and away from his students. Furthermore, he noted “the meetings brought about increased stress by discussing what he did right or wrong.” One of the areas identified was lack of adequate documentation; according to the auditor, Calvin needed more evidence to support how the program was being operated.
Calvin remarked that he is determined to be a good steward of the district’s funds, as he does not want his building cited, and the funding pulled. Therefore, he planned on being more meticulous in how rules and regulations are implemented. In this context, he noted, “I have to make sure we spend the money correctly or we have documented things correctly.”

For Calvin, school improvement is something you want to work on it all year but the reality is that the school improvement process is sometimes moved to the end of the year and, as such, becomes more stressful. It was interesting to note that when it came to discussing this area Calvin did not defer to his team or his teachers. He appeared to take more accountability for how Title 1 was managed.

**Increased Responsibility for Student Testing**

Calvin discussed the number of tests currently being administered by his administrative team and teaching staff. Those tests are the PSAT, NWEA, and MSTEP. He reflected as the number of student tests increased so did the level of stress increase for all stakeholders. The building gets rated from the state based on how the students perform on the state assessment. Thus, the accountability piece is embedded into the process and once the results are published, this transfers into increased stress for teachers, students and administrators. Teachers have a data piece that is 20% of students’ achievement on the state assessment. A separate growth score is computed using NWEA as its baseline. He noted the teachers’ and students’ scores are combined to form a building score, which is then factored into the building principals’ score. During the interview, Calvin made an interesting comment that gives insight into his character, “I tell the teachers let us take the stress from the testing, and from the parents, you focus on being on fire for the kids getting the best out of the kids.”
Increased Responsibility for Teacher Evaluations

Calvin expressed that he has an obligation to make sure his teachers are hitting the appropriate benchmarks in the curriculum. He noted he has a lot of new teachers, which suggests that his workload has increased. Each new teacher has requirements assigned by the state. The building principal is held accountable to make sure these regulations are designed, developed and delivered. Included in these state mandates are holding a new teacher induction program; being assigned a mentor and participating in a mentor induction program. Also, all new teachers are assigned four new teacher evaluations per year to be completed by designated dates.

While tenure teachers are evaluated twice a year, according to the state mandates, the state deadlines are fixed. His building uses use the Marzano Focused Teacher Evaluation Model, which has 45 domains and uses a common language for superintendents, administrators and teachers. Once teachers and administrators understand this complex instrument, it is less subjective, than the previous models used for evaluation. Calvin admits that there is increased stress in teachers and administrators’ efforts to meet the state or federal guidelines. He acknowledged that, “I definitely don’t want to have the State people mad at me…we try to deal with the whole child not just our evaluation.” Calvin admits, as the building principal, he and his assistant principal have increased responsibility for completing teacher evaluations.

Increased Responsibility for Principal Evaluation

According to Calvin, the district selected Marzano’s School Leadership Framework for principal evaluations. This instrument is approved by the State Department of Education and works in conjunction with the Marzano Focused Teacher Evaluation Framework and the Marzano District Leadership Evaluation Framework for Superintendents. He believes that it is a good thing, because when he is working on his teacher evaluations, he is also working on his
evaluation. The same thing is true for the state assessment data, once the student data is disaggregated, the teachers get a score, and he gets a score for the building. Calvin’s true position on principal’s evaluation can be best viewed by examining this quote:

I am not stressed over my evaluation. I try to put things in the front end. If I do what I am supposed to do, my evaluation will take care of itself. I worry about am I doing the best I can for my teachers.

**Experiences with Significant Stress**

Calvin’s identifies himself as a perfectionist coupled with this mindset job embedded stress is present in everything that he does. Calvin reported that he receives significant stress when he must work with the unknown. Thus, everything about his job from day – to - day operations, managing federal and state mandates, student testing, personnel decisions, and community relations are stressful.

Calvin shared several examples of incidences, which brought him significant amounts of additional stress. Calvin reflected, “Going to meet with the Title 1 auditor, starting the new PSAT 1 Test, and having to make up teacher evaluations because of the Polar Vortex were all stressful events.” Additionally, there is increased stress when school is canceled because of the Polar Vortex and he and his assistant principal had to make up teacher evaluations.

However, Calvin did mention there are different kinds of stress. One of the most stressful is teacher evaluations. Calvin says he gets frustrated when he has been working with a teacher and has tried everything he knows, and the teacher does not show any improvement. He reflected when this scenario develops “I have to regroup. I talk with my other administrators about things I might need to try.” Calvin frequently tells his teachers to let him and the other administrators take the heat or pressure from the parents. He wants teachers focusing all their
energy on being creative and innovative for the students. Calvin believes if the students are happy and smiling learning is taking place. Conversely, if the students are not having fun learning is not taking place. In summation Calvin sees everything about his job as extremely stressful.

**Coping Strategies Frequently Used**

Calvin stated that when he is dealing with stressful situations he often relies on some coping mechanisms, and some individual coping strategies. The first place he looks to for support is from his administrative team, and the way Calvin talks about this team, you can hear in his voice a great deal of pride. He noted “the members of his team know each other’s strengths and weaknesses and they hold each other accountable;” His behavior suggests there is a high degree of trust that goes along with being a part of his team. For example, Calvin shared just before we met he went and checked on the behavioral specialist who was dealing with a very stressful situation. He wanted to see if she was alright and to let her know he was there, if she needed anything.

Calvin mentioned that one of his responses to handling a stressful situation is to keep a positive mental attitude and to remain objective. In that context, he also tries to maintain a sense of humor and use humor to lighten the mood. For example, after having a difficult meeting, he will go to the cafeteria and talk with a cafeteria worker or visit with some students. According to Calvin, if working on a difficult task and he begins to feel overwhelmed, he will put it down, go into a science classroom, special education classroom, and observe for a while, before returning to his office to complete the task. He uses a variety of individual strategies to handle the stress that comes with leading a middle school.
Coping Preference Scale Findings

Calvin selected items from the Coping Preference Scale he most likely uses: (1) set realistic goals, (2) maintain a sense of humor, and (3) create a more positive and self-supportive mental set. The items Calvin selected are consistent with his interview. The items Calvin selected as least likely to use as a coping skill are: (1) withdraw physically and leave the building, and (2) use relaxation and stress management techniques. Calvin reflected his parents always talked to him about quitting. It was unacceptable to walk away before the job was done. At the very least you needed a plan for returning and finishing the task. Therefore, Calvin would never consider leaving the building or walking away leaving the job undone. The items Calvin selected were consistent with his interview.

Table 13

Calvin’s Coping Preference Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Used Coping Skills</th>
<th>Least Used Coping Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set realistic goals</td>
<td>Withdraw, physically leave the building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a sense of humor</td>
<td>Use relaxation and stress management techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk with family and friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a more positive and self-supportive mental set</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter IV Summary

This chapter offered the individual narrative profiles for each of my principal participants. Let us now turn to Chapter V, which will summarize the themes revealed when looking across all my participants.
CHAPTER V
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study is to illuminate and disaggregate how 12 Midwestern middle school principals navigate accountability, stress, and coping skills as they lead schools under the auspices of new federal and state mandates. In order to gain clarity on the issues surrounding our educational system and how middle school principals are impacted, I utilized a research methodology known as a purposeful selection. This process was used to secure a sample population of 12 Midwestern public middle school principals whose students’ demographics represented school systems that included Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools. Each principal had a minimum of three years of administrative experience. Individual profiles were created in Chapter 4 with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the middle school principals’ perceptions of (a) an increase in their responsibilities for implementing federal and state mandates, (b) issues surrounding student testing, (c) teacher evaluations, (d) principal evaluations, (e) stress, and (f) coping skills. A semi-structured interview questionnaire and Allison’s Coping Preference Scale were utilized to collect my data.

The principals’ responses to the semi-structured interview and survey were then coded. “A code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic purposes” (Saldana, 2013, p. 4). Or simply stated, coding is the transitional process between data collection and the more extensive data analysis (Saldana, 2013, p. 5). Once the interview and survey were completed, I proceeded with the analysis phase by reducing down and eliminating useless words and phrases. Saldana (2013) alerts the researcher to the fact that during the reduction phases themes emerge that, in fact, are enhanced by the
process. In this connection, any themes that emerged from the analysis of the findings are intertwined in each section. Overall, my research purpose was to acquire a sense of how state and federal mandates increased the principals’ responsibilities, the key stressors in their work-life, and what coping strategies they put in place to mitigate the stress. Hence, Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the themes derived from interviews with 12 Midwestern middle school principals.

**Major and Minor Theme Narratives**

This chapter provides an analysis of the findings compiled from the major themes and sub themes. In total, I found 11 themes as detailed in the sections that follow which provide a greater understanding of the principals’ perception of their work environment. Nine of these themes were major themes (with 7+ principals noting that issue), while two were minor themes (with 4-6 principals noting this issue). Table 15 at the end of this chapter lists all such themes, as well as the principal from which data to support each was acquired.

**Theme 1: Nearly All Principals Experienced an Increase in their Responsibilities for Implementing Federal and State Mandates**

One of my central research questions focused on whether any additional responsibilities were recently added to their role as middle school principal. The majority, 10 of 12 principals reported experiencing an increased workload as a result of complying with recent federal and state mandates. Only two of 12 principals reported that they did not experience an increase in their responsibilities for managing the recent federal and state programs.

A large part of their workday is consumed with meeting various state and federal mandates for the vast majority of principals. In one form or another, middle school principals find themselves engulfed with additional responsibilities, per federal and state mandates. Among the additional responsibilities are specific school improvement programs or some other state or federal program utilizing federal or state funding (e.g., Title 1, 31 A, Title VI, and Title IX to
name a few), meeting various rules and regulations which include managing budgets, implementing programs, evaluating programs, allocating resources, professional development, and preparing monotonous and dilatory reports, all while simultaneously working to complete daily operations and improve their schools. Ivan shared:

As a principal it is a matter of balancing. I should say the management of the role and instructional leadership of the role. So, there is always accountability that is there with making sure you are taking care of the job, but there is also that piece of what does the job look like day to day? Am I managing facilities, managing staff, or am I able to lead staff? I try to spend as much time in the leading role, versus the managing role, and what that looks like is being out of my office, having conversations versus just taking care of managerial roles, and viewing my role as a servant leader, as an instructional leader, being in classrooms, giving feedback to teachers.

Adam said, “Allocation of my time is of more importance to me than it used to be.” Harold followed by stating, “If the intermediate school district, superintendent and central office did not help manage Title 1, School Improvement, 31A, and other federal and state mandates, the job of principal would be overwhelming.” David shared,

You know we give more than just the state assessment, we give the Scholastic Math Inventory, four times a year. We give the Scholastic reading inventory four times a year. Additionally, teachers give common assessments which are which are usually for students’ grades. You could have anywhere from 4 or 5 to 25 common assessments or class projects in a semester. These common assessments are more high stakes than MSTEP because the common assessments represent
70% of the students’ grade… so the one thing we have worked on is to make those assessments quality rigorous. But also, making sure that they are consistent in the same way we give it.

John shared:

When you are identified as a failing school, no one wants to be perceived as failing, knowing the hard work and efforts that go into it…. you put in extra work because you want to remove the label as soon as possible…. So we had to work diligently with the Michigan Department of Education and central office to come up with plans. And we are proud to announce that our schools have continued to grow, removing us from what was formerly known as priority schools. And I believe they are called partner schools now.

Interestingly, the two principals who claimed that they did not have an increase in work responsibilities worked for affluent school districts that exceeded the U.S. poverty guidelines. Upon closer inspection, both middle schools have different needs. One principal, Ivan, indicated, “Students at his school spoke 30 different languages and needed interpreters and tutors.” The other principal, Bob, indicated that during this past winter, when the district was closed due to inclement weather, some of his most vulnerable, food challenged children (about 8% of his student population) may not have had enough to eat. He was worried he may not have been able to service them in a time of crisis. Thus, it is important to note that, while these two principals claimed to not have had any increase in their workload, it does appear that they might have understated their workloads with respect to implementing any recent federal and state mandates.
Theme 2: The Vast Majority of Principals indicated their Roles and Responsibilities changed under the Federal and State Testing Mandates

The vast majority of the principals reported that complying with the many federal and state mandates involving student testing resulted in an increase in their job responsibilities. Hence, 10 of 12 principals reported they experienced an increase in work responsibilities relative to student testing. John shared:

I would say other areas especially in the middle school, are relative to social emotional. We have a program called Handle with Care because they [kids] are subjected to law enforcement and other issues at home, which make it difficult for them to come ready to learn. And other behaviors relative to mental health and mental wellness that middle schoolers bring that can present some challenges throughout the school year.

Several principals shared that as part of preparation for the state testing program, their districts created their own in-house testing programs: For example, Ed discussed one such program called “IReady” which is a diagnostic test given twice a year designed to work in conjunction with the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) that is given to eighth grade students. Ed spoke proudly of his involvement with creating professional development and training opportunities for the entire district teachers, support staff, and administrators. He stated: Our work now is how do we bring in the best techniques, best approaches, best products, the best curricula so that all people can have a piece of that action… well, we have district indicators based upon data that was generated. We got 60 teachers together to come up with what indicators, based upon the data we have for our district, are the highest leverage? So we are kind of doing that now to a degree and the cool thing is, if we train, if we do our PD, if we do these
things under these specific areas with these specific filters, we should be able to expect a change, and so now that is where we are pushing.

Harold shared how his district has created a unified curriculum, using formative tests that are aligned vertically and horizontally, per grade level, so that a sending or receiving teacher knows exactly what material students have mastered. This principal reported that, in order to gain more local autonomy, their unified testing program had replaced North West Evaluation Association (NWEA) and Michigan Assessment Program (MAP). Harold reflected” since this change, someone in my building is now testing from the week of spring break until the last week of school.” He also said, “I know the state averages are pretty low on that test right now, but what we shoot for as a building is to try not to stress ourselves out too much. We are trying to be at or above the state averages if we can.”

Comments made by John, a former priority school principal, further illustrate the point that many of the principals experienced increased work responsibilities relative to student testing. John said, “Well, with student testing, there’s a lot of work that goes into the set up. It’s a highly monitored testing environment and so you want to make sure it’s implemented with fidelity, without any irregularities.” George, a small rural school principal, added, “You have to get out a ruler, a meter stick, and measure head to head. They can only be so many feet close to each other.” In brief, most middle school principals agreed that meeting the many nuanced rules and regulations relative to student assessments indeed increased their work responsibility.

Conversely, only two principals indicated their work experience were minimal relative to state testing. Frank represented an unusual case. The district he works for has taken the position that it minimizes the importance of the state testing program because it was putting too much pressure on the students, and not in the students’ best interest. In this district, the administrators
are minimizing the importance of the state mandated test with the support of their board of education.

Working in an affluent middle school, Bob shared he was not primarily responsible for the student testing program; that responsibility had been given to one of his assistants. However, Bob was responsible for making sure everyone was ready for the test. He makes sure that everyone has the correct number of computers, chrome books, or iPads to take the test; the testing schedules have been publicized; teachers and support staff have been properly trained; and targets for students per curricular area have been established. He also continued to meet with the assistant principal regarding testing issues. Thus, interestingly, while Bob noted no additional work or stress related to required testing, his role being minimalized may be vastly understated.

Theme 3: All Principals have Complaints and Stress Complying with State Testing Mandates

All 12 principals registered a wide range of complaints about the state mandated testing program. Frank shared “I don’t want to test kids just to test kids. If we think it is going to be, if we are either A being told we have to do it, or B, it is going to be useful and meaningful then we will do it. If it is not, then I don’t want to engage in it.” He went on to say “we are already working in stressful, anxiety filled space with kids. Our kids are dealing with more social, emotional issues and trauma issues now... trauma impacts kids’ ability to learn.”

David expressed a similar concern, “you know you got to look at the social emotional piece. As well kids are more than just a test score.” Adam commented, “we talk a lot in our building that you teach kids. You don’t teach science, you don’t teach math, you don’t English. That is the stuff you use to make a difference with a young person.” Leon raised the issue saying “it is difficult getting students ready for a test that is constantly changing from MAP to MSTEP to PSAT to ACT. Each test measures something different and has a different protocol.”
Adam complained about the test results being used as scorecards in the local newspaper comparing school districts. Frank complained that the state test caused too much stress for students and teachers. George complained about making sure his building had enough working technology, thus enabling everyone to be tested at the same time. Harold expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of lost instructional time due to testing. David grumbled about not being able to create a testing environment tailored to his student’s needs. Ivan and John announced that time spent on test preparation was wasted versus time spent on quality instruction. Calvin fretted that not getting testing results back in a timely manner harmed planning and preparation for next year. Leon and Kevin were concerned about student and parent apathy regarding how students performed on the state test. Other principals identified not having time to adequately prepare for the different test MAP, PSAT, and ACT.

Overall, there were numerous complaints by all 12 principals regarding state mandated testing; all voiced that state mandated testing is stressful on all stakeholders. Indeed, various testing issues revealed the amount of stress generated for students, teachers and administrators. The number one and two stressors affecting their work life were student assessments and teacher evaluations. John said, “to have kids tested… is not only stressful on the students but on the staff as well. … teachers’ evaluations are always a stressful time.” John’s comments were supported by Harold’s, who shared, “I would say student testing and teacher evaluation a close second because they go hand in hand.”

**Theme 4: All Principals’ Responsibilities Increased Meeting Mandate Regarding Teacher Evaluations, But Agree Evaluations are Now Better**

In this Midwestern state there are four teacher evaluation models approved by the Department of Education for use in teacher evaluation: the Danielson Framework, 5 Dimensions Plus (5D), Marzano Framework, and the Thoughtful Classroom. The 5D model is the most
popular evaluation tool among the participants, as seven middle school principals reported using it. Two districts use the Marzano framework, and one each used Danielson, and the Thoughtful Classroom. The McREL model was selected by one district although it was not on the approved list of evaluation models recommended by the state; each evaluation model utilizes different schema to assess teachers’ knowledge of pedagogy, assessment, classroom management, relationships, and professionalism.

An analysis of the principals’ comments indicates all 12 principals, regardless of what evaluation model used, experienced an increase in their work responsibilities when it came to teacher evaluations. Calvin commented that:

There is an additional responsibility for principals if we have teachers who are not performing to the levels of our expectations, and obviously that increases responsibilities for getting in and providing them the coaching and the additional evaluations that we have to meet their performance goals.

As another example, Frank articulated:

So, for our district again, I think has found a great way to meet the expectations of the state. We are expected to, at a minimum, in every classroom six to nine times throughout the year, with some kind of feedback to teachers. Okay? So, for us last year, for my building, our building, we were in [each] classroom anywhere between 12 and 25 times with some sort of feedback.

However, each principal reported that the evaluation model currently being used was better than what had been used previously to evaluate teachers. They admitted that learning the new evaluation models was tedious, time consuming, and difficult. Although, the results
indicated principals were better prepared to work with teachers who were rated as marginal or ineffective. Calvin shared that his district uses Marzano and said:

It is nice. Don’t get me wrong, it’s nice because it is less subjective, I think than what our evaluation model was like prior to adopting it. It gives us very good talking points with our teachers when we have to sit down and have those discussions with them.

David shared:

I would say the teacher evaluation is probably something that has actually been, I would say, probably the most positive piece. I think we are ready. I look back at where some of the evaluations I had, I will be honest. My principal reflected, can you sign these at the end of the year, I know I’ve been in your classroom, I’ve walked by your classroom, I know you’re good with kids.’ But there really wasn’t a great presence of instructional leadership. I think a lot of principals 20 years ago were building managers. Now the focus obviously is on instructional leadership. And I think that has been positive.

Ed shared:

So is it a lot of time to get all the observations in and do all... That’s where the power of movement gonna be. No matter how many open houses, no matter how many fun things. Unless we can fundamentally affect that 55-minute period we ain’t changing any of that. And also, the hard part for me is if any principal says it’s too much time then what are you doing? Because this dum dum, I work both lunches, I work after-school push off, and I am still making my observations. I continue every year to try to commit more time to doing the coaching, doing the
educational leader stuff but, by golly gum drop, we have got to do it and 5D is a brilliant tool.

Regarding teacher evaluations, Harold said:

Principals are acutely aware of the impact that state mandates have on teachers. The additional stress comes from the new mandates regarding layoff… if you are a teacher and your student data is not looking good, a 25-year teacher could end up losing their job over five -year teacher. …We have to do a minimum of three full classroom observations a year, which they are usually about an hour or longer. We have to have a pre-meeting and a post-meeting with every teacher before and after the observations, and then it’s just quite a long process. I will say, though, I have had some of my best collegial conversations with teachers I have ever had in my career.

Principals David, Frank, and George reported there clearly has been a shift in their roles as principals from building manager to instructional supervisor. They noted a shift in their role as principals in the last 10 years. They are no longer rated as an effective principal based solely on being a good building manager, and teachers are no longer viewed as effective classroom teachers based solely on being a good classroom disciplinarian. Therefore, the role the principal plays observing and evaluating classroom teachers is extremely important.

Ed shared that principals are not only concerned with learning new evaluation tools, but the state also has some specific requirements regarding how tenure and non-tenure teachers are to be evaluated. This requirement is one that causes increased work-related responsibilities for principals. Overall, the findings, regarding teachers’ evaluations, were quite clear that principals felt increased roles and responsibilities for meeting the state and federal mandates tied directly to
teacher evaluations. The principals stated, that regardless of the teacher evaluation model selected, learning to use it effectively was a labor intense process. David said:

But I do think as far as the conversations the feedback we give teachers, the actual observation protocols and things like that are much better than the check boxes that I remember when I first started doing them, or when I was a teacher and it was check a box, check a box. Now it is there’s no rubrics, you know you are answering questions, you are scripting. And what we are seeing and what we are hearing the conversations going on in the classrooms. Then we have to code it, these certain dimensions…I think that part has been much more beneficial. And I think it’s supporting teacher growth and teacher learning. And making you know the skill set of the teacher better.

**Theme 5: Most Principals reported Teachers Stress over Evaluations and in Some Cases, the Administrators as well, but to a Far Less Degree**

One of the key elements to understanding principals’ frustration with teachers’ evaluations is time. A look back in time reveals that Public Act 102 in 2011 laid the foundation for educator evaluations in Michigan. This legislative act was revised, clarified, and expanded in November 2015, when Public Act 173 was signed into law. This legislation governs educator evaluations for teachers (MCL 380.1249) and administrators (MCL 380.1249b) (MDE, 2015, p. 3). Contextually, PA173 requires that educator evaluations be conducted using state approved evaluation instruments that are research based, rigorous, and the process for conducting the evaluation must be transparent (MDE, 2019, p. 5). Furthermore, PA173 requires that evaluations must be conducted annually and they must incorporate student growth as a significant component, beginning at 25% in the 2015-2016 school year, and going to 40% in the 2019-2020 (MDE, 2015, p. 5). Beginning in the 2019 - 2020 school year, 50%, of the student’s growth
in the core content areas will be measured utilizing the state assessments. Thus, these scores are factored into teachers’ evaluations as per MCL380. 1249 (2)(a)(ii) in ELA and or math in grades 4 through 8 (MDE, 2015, p. 5).

A sample of a school’s culture can be made by examining teachers’ perceptions of their teacher evaluation system. According to most of the principals, teachers expressed having an aversion to teacher evaluations. Ivan reflected “I did not want evaluations to be like I got you moments. When I first took over the school there was a lack of trust, and I have worked hard to change that culture.” Ed shared:

You cannot disregard the fact that we are being judged by these numbers. It’s definitely, well, it’s had a significant increase because legislatively all of our evaluations are directly tied to student growth … Deming says what we are doing as a nation is contrary to quality management. Because we are taking an end measure and saying, everything will be thus and so. What do people do? They lie, they cheat, or they do a combination of the two to make that number, if they are not able.

Ivan articulated:

There is certainly that fear, though, that exists, whether it be with principals or with teachers, that this evaluation is in large part because how my kids perform. There is always that feeling of, well, I have such a transient population, and I have not had these students that long. We hope that teachers feel their work is meaningful, and it is not just hinged completely on the student scores.

Additionally, the principals identified the accompanying stress associated with administering teacher evaluations as harmful to teachers and principals. They voiced
experiencing fear and anxiety relative to teacher evaluations and the principals’ increased responsibilities. Examples are: (a) some principals identified mistrust among teachers about the fairness of the evaluation based on a changing growth factor tied to student performance on the state assessment, (b) other principals identified not having enough time to adequately prepare for the different tests; (MAP, PSAT, ACT), and (c) some principals were concerned about the stressful meetings involving a minimally effective or ineffective teacher evaluation.

John reflected teacher evaluations are always stressful. He has 60 classroom teachers. Each must have a pre-inquiry, four to six, classroom observations for 20 minutes each, a mid-year inquiry and a final evaluation with a grade that has to be sent to the Human Resources at the State of Michigan. He shares responsibility for teacher evaluations with other administrators in the building. Occasionally this does not work well as the assistant may miss deadlines or feel uncomfortable with an evaluation that may end up less than satisfactory. Or a teacher may ask to be evaluated by a different administrator [principal shopping] hoping to receive a more favorable rating from someone other than principal or the assistant principal assigned the task.

Frank shared that his district took two and a half years to roll out the teacher evaluation model. Frank reflected teacher evaluations are always stressful. He cited an example:

One year that there was no highly effective [teachers] and from their lens [teachers] they are saying, Listen, other districts do this and I know that there’s no way teacher ABC in this particular district is highly effective, but yet they are highly effective, and they had an administrator come in twice. You came into my room ten times. And then you are telling me that we are just all going to be effective? So, how is that going to affect me professionally? Teachers believed as
administrators we passed the buck out on that one. We did not stand up and support them.

**Theme 6: Most Principals Voiced No Real Increased Responsibilities or Stress associated with Principal Evaluations**

The 12 administrators in this study were evaluated by four different principal evaluation models. The School ADvance evaluation system was used by seven school districts. The seven administrators were David, Ed, Frank, Ivan, John, Leon, and Kevin. The 5 Dimensions Plus (5D Plus) model was used by two districts to evaluate Adam and George. Two other districts chose to use the Marzano School Leadership Evaluation Model (MSLEM) to evaluate their administrators Bob and Calvin. There was one district, Harold’s, that chose to use McREL to evaluate its middle school administrator.

Seven of 12 principals specifically voiced that they did not feel as though there was an increase in their responsibility as a result of their own evaluation; however, the words of a few principals did reflect on a different reality that there was indeed some increase in their responsibility when it came to their evaluations. An example of a principal who is cognizant of the increased responsibility is reflected in the words of the principal who said, “there is only one set of numbers you can’t throw away the kids.” As a result, there is an increase in their responsibilities because per legislative mandate their evaluations are directly tied to student growth. Another principal, Calvin said, I understand that I am evaluated based on the success or failure of my teachers and our student body.” Principals reluctantly agreed their evaluations are aligned with teacher evaluations, which serve as extension of how the students performed on the state assessment. Several of the principals David, George, Harold, Calvin, and Ivan reported, when talking with staff and staff are complaining about the evaluation process, and particularly
the percentage of student growth as measured by student achievement on the state assessment.

David reminds teachers “we are all in this together I am judged by the same numbers you are.”

According to the principal’s comments, regardless of the system used to evaluate principals, School Advance System, 5DPlus, Marzano or McREL, the results are very similar. If there is a good working and personal relationship between the principal and the superintendent, then there is nothing to be stressed about relative to principal evaluations. Frank said,

Principal evaluations …I am going to be honest with you, it depends on the setting that you are in. I have a great relationship, working relationship, personal relationship with our superintendent. So, I don’t get stressed about my evaluation. I hope that doesn’t sound egotistical. It’s not meant to sound a certain way. But it is to say that I believe that if there was an issue with something that I was doing or a concern with anything I have confidence and trust in my superintendent or anyone in central office that come and say, Frank hey, look it, you got to get on the right track with this, right. Because I think it’s more authentic that way. And I think we have done work as a team to minimize the stress that comes along with those.

**Theme 7: All Principals Identified Some Enhanced Areas of Stress Beyond Testing and Evaluations**

All 12 principals were able to easily identify stressors in their work lives. One principal did not comment on how stress affected him personally other than to discuss how when people left the district from various positions his workload increased. Another principal commented he only stresses about his car when a yellow light comes on. Ivan articulated:

I have been through the different color codes. I have been through the process of being a focus school in my previous district, close to being a priority school. So, I
was familiar with the external pressure that comes down either through Lansing or MDE or a combination of both. So, recently the top to bottom ranking have gone away, but the next phase that’s coming is the letter grade. So, I know it passed the House and it’s heading off to the Senate, and obviously it would wait for the governor’s signature. If it gets that far, and that would rank schools and put a letter grade associated with a school, which can be nerve wrecking a bit because parents know what a letter grade is. They know what a letter A is. They know what a C is. They know what an F is. The early reports would show that majority of schools and districts would fall in the C to D range, and very few would even approach the A range, and then there would be an even little bit larger group in the B range.

David stated that, the very nature of the middle school principals’ position is stressful. The position is a middle management position. As such the principal often must implement decisions he may not agree with, or he must implement decisions he does not believe are in the best interest of his teachers, support staff or students. David says implementing these types of decisions are indeed stressful. David was not alone in his position as George, Calvin, Adam, Ed, and Leon shared similar experiences.

Another observation made by principals is that teachers, staff, and student stress are transferred to them. For example, Ed states, “on a stress meter, from 1 to 10, teachers used to begin the year out with a 2 or 3. Today using the same stress meter teachers are beginning the year out on a level 5 or 6 out of 10.” Ed says when that happens, teachers are more stressed, and he is affected; when he is stressed he becomes more rigid, less flexible, more anti-social and has poor interactions with staff and students.
Furthermore, Ed believes that social media is one of his biggest stressors; and Facebook is a conundrum for the building principal. It has become the new slam book, a gateway for bullying, fighting, vaping, and sexting; social media is a more effective way to be bad. David reflected slam books use to eat your heart out whereas social media takes your soul. Leon concurred and stated that he is stressed by students abusing social media. He says students lie to get a social media account and when they are caught their parents enable them by supporting their inappropriate behavior.

Communications with parents also rated high as a stressor for several principals. For example, Adam shared his frustration of working with parents who enable their children by arguing their children should not receive any consequences for making poor decisions. He says, “I went home with headaches on three separate occasions this year” as parents were unwilling to cut the umbilical cord. He said, “I went home and vented to my wife… I believe that middle school children have not changed; what has changed is parenting and the way society views education.”

Such comments were also shared by several of the middle school principals. David recalled a story about how a parent had emailed him in the morning about his child being bullied. David reflected he had not seen the email until late in the afternoon, as he had been in meetings all morning, and conducting teacher observations in the afternoon. David reflected he saw the parent after school at a football game and the parent was irate because David had not replied to his email. David reflected he apologized for not getting back to the parent sooner but the parent did not want to hear it! David shared that this problem with modern technology is one that everyone expects instant service. These or similar incidences were reported as recurring stressors by middle school principals.
Bob also noted he stresses over a variety of work-related issues and cites several examples namely: (a) not meeting deadlines, (b) using the coaching model effectively with his staff, and (c) fully meeting the needs of his staff. Bob noted his staff can tell when he is stressed; he may walk faster, and his use of sarcasm increases.

While the previously mentioned comments may be viewed as fairly common place, some events identified by Frank might be viewed as extremely stressful: a student dying while attending his school, a teacher accused of acting sexually inappropriate with a student, an expulsion hearing, and a difficult evaluation leading to a recommendation of termination of the teacher. It should be noted that Frank’s comments were not made in isolation. Other principals shared similar stories. In this context, David shared his experience regarding visiting a former student in prison, or sitting in court with a child and watching as one parent is sent to prison, and trying to figure out how to best help the child; also, addressing a classroom after a classmate has committed suicide, or after one of their teachers died.

**Theme 8: Stress has a Negative Impact on the Personal Lives of Many Principals**

Nine principals, Ed, Harold, Frank, Kevin, Adam, David, Ivan, Bob, and George shared how the stress of being a middle school principal affects them on a personal level. Ed noted the more stressed he becomes the more he begins to have a “potty mouth,” using profanity. Moreover, when he is stressed, he becomes antisocial and he is less likely to attend social gatherings. According to Ed, another way to tell when he was stressed related to how much he smokes. The more stressed he was, the more he smoked; Ed shared “I quit smoking a couple years ago. I was up to two packs a day. I love the nicotine.” Ed also shared when he is really stressed he may have a drink during the week, not just on the weekend. In this situation, he said,
“My best friend, my wife, usually tightens me up and that causes me to change my behavior rather quickly.”

Harold discussed what appears to be a common occurrence among some of the principals. During the school year if I ever have an appointment at the doctor… I always have high blood pressure… I always talk my doctor into… coming back … I have normal blood pressure late June, July, early August. Kevin says when school is out for the summer, he does not have high blood pressure. However, when school is in session he has high blood pressure. Frank reflected, “I never had high blood pressure until I became a principal.

Bob laughed and noted, although he would say he is not overly stressed at work, his doctor is mystified that when he became a middle school principal he became ill and had to stay home from school for an extended period of time on more than one occasion. Bob was not the only principal who shared a similar story.

Ivan shared: I don’t exercise as much as I need too. The job can create a level of stress where I may not have as much energy to work out or to run. I find myself in the best shape in the summertime when I am not experiencing stress at work… Eating is another thing I don’t always do a great job of, and that goes along with physical health.” David said, I was a hell of a lot lighter and didn’t weigh nearly as much. I wish I had exercised some more.” Harold added that ‘I know that I stress myself out I cannot leave work at school…a couple nights a week I will be thinking so much I cannot sleep.” Bob shared; when I am stressed I am more sarcastic with my staff. George mentioned that, as a result of stress, “I try not to be short tempered. I try not to take it out on people here at school.” George continued, “I sometimes take that home, and trying to not be a bottle that is just full and corked you have to at least get what you are thinking and
feeling out.” The principals reported that during the summer, when they are not working, their physical and mental health, and family relationships were much better.

In sum, the principals reported that working in a stressful environment had a personal effect on their health, as many principals could identify health related issues. Several of the principals reported working with high blood pressure. Other principals reported sleep issues, and not being able to turn school off. Several principals mentioned that working in stressful environments had caused them to miss work on more than one occasion due to health-related issues.

**Theme 9: All Principals use a Variety of Coping Strategies Daily to Relieve Stress**

Principals handle stress in multitude ways – some responses are destructive, while other responses are constructive. For example, a person finds pleasure in eating as a way to deal with working in a stressful environment and becomes obese. Another person working in a similar stressful environment decides to go to the gymnasium 5 days a week to work out and relieve stress, while simultaneously controlling the weight. Knowing that there are countless ways to respond to stress it was logical to find a tool that was designed specifically to measure how principal’s response to stressful situations. I chose Allison’s Coping Preference Scale parenthetically, the Coping Preference Scale, which is a 26 item, six-point Likert Scale, where 0 equals never and 5 equals always, measuring frequency of use (Allison, 1997, p. 42). This scale was used to identify the most frequently used coping strategies by the 12 principals, and their aggregate selections are listed in Table 14, followed by the average mean and standard deviation for each coping strategy. I will summarize the top 11 strategies and the bottom three offered via the scale, as well as some information from the interviews to support such selections.
The number one most frequently used coping strategy selected by these middle school principals to ameliorate stress was to maintain a sense of humor. This not only had the highest average (4.50), but was also mentioned within the interviews. As Frank shared:

I could give you a story from yesterday where we dealt with an extremely stressful situation, and at the end of it we are debriefing, and we have to find a little bit of humor in it or it is going to weigh even more.

Adam also shared:

You have got to kind of feel your way around and laughter goes a long way. Parents come in, you let them vent, and then you say what happens and you do it with a bit of a chuckle at the end and then everybody’s cooled off and it’s okay.

Let’s work together and figure out what we are going to do about this.

The second most frequently used coping strategy was practicing good human relation skills with students, teachers, and parents ($M = 4.42$). As an example, Adam shared a story when deciding about children in his building. He will ask a question? How will the outcome of this decision affect this child in the future? If the outcome does not appear to benefit the child in the future, the group will make a different decision.

With the same mean as the previous, the third most frequently used coping strategy was approaching problems optimistically and objectively ($M = 4.42$). Frank shared a process he uses to ensure that he goes into meetings with a positive mindset. For example, Frank reported, after having a difficult meeting, he will wash his hands, read scriptures, and pray before starting his next meeting. He does not want to carry any negative thoughts with him into his next meeting.
Table 14

**Principals’ Scores on Allison’s Coping Preference Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategies</th>
<th>Adam</th>
<th>Bob</th>
<th>Calvin</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Ed</th>
<th>Frank</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Harold</th>
<th>Ivan</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Kevin</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a sense of humor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice good human relation skills with students, teachers, and parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach problems optimistically and objectively</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set realistic goals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk with family and close friends</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in active non-work or play activities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain regular sleep habits</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegate responsibility</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talk to district administrators or principals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular physical exercise</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take mini vacations, weekend getaways</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize in-service to increase repertoire of management skills</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work harder evenings and weekends</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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</table>
Table 14—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategies</th>
<th>Adam</th>
<th>Bob</th>
<th>Calvin</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Ed</th>
<th>Frank</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Harold</th>
<th>Ivan</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Kevin</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prioritize and use time management techniques</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in less active non-work activities (e.g., movies)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create more positive and self-supportive mental sets</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in activities that promote spiritual growth</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain good health habits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compartmentalize work and non-work</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socializing/lunch with others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek solitude, slow down workplace, take time to reflect</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break from daily routine temporarily to a different task</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish office procedures so that visitors are screened</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use relaxation and stress management techniques</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdraw physically from the situation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The fourth most frequently used coping strategy was setting realistic goals \((M = 4.20)\), which is aligned with the principal’s additional responsibilities for leading school improvement as mandated by the federal and state governments. For example, Ivan shared one of his goals was to meet with each student during the year, and review their progress toward reaching their academic and behavioral goals. Additionally, he sets goals for every meeting with the superintendent, central office, teachers, and support staff.

The fifth most frequently used coping strategy was talking with friends and family \((M = 4.10)\). Adam talked about the importance of keeping his close friends separate from his co-workers.

The sixth most frequently used coping strategy was engaging in non-work play activities like camping, boating, or hunting \((M = 4.00)\). These activities combine some aspects of physical exercise with pleasure sending signals to the brain that you are having a good time. Thus, principals engaged in these activities are working simultaneously on their physical and mental health.

The seventh most frequently used coping strategy was maintaining regular sleep habits \((M = 3.90)\). Frank shared the importance of maintaining regular sleeping patterns as a component of achieving balance at work.

The eighth most frequently used coping strategy was delegating responsibly \((M = 3.80)\), although some specifically noted that they do not delegate well.

The ninth most frequently used coping strategy was talking with other principals \((M = 3.75)\). Bob, Frank, Ivan, Harold, David, George, and John all shared that networking with other principals and attending professional development conferences was an important way to reduce stress and stay current.
The tenth most frequently used coping strategy was engaging in regular physical exercise ($M = 3.67$). Several of the principals described exercise programs they participated in with their wives as a way to stay physically fit and cope with stress.

With the same mean, the eleventh most frequently used coping strategy was taking mini vacations on the weekend ($M = 3.67$). George shared buying a camper so he could take his wife and kids camping on the weekend and on vacations during the summer. Frank shared participating in youth camps, with his wife and children on the weekend and during summer vacation. Adam mentioned going to his cabin on the weekends with his wife and close friends.

Conversely, there were three coping strategies principals selected as least likely to use when working within stressful environments. The 24th lowest was establishing office procedures so that visitors are screened ($M = 2.50$). The 25th lowest was using relaxation and stress management techniques ($M = 1.83$). The least preferred coping strategy was withdrawing physically from a situation ($M = 1.75$).

**Theme 10: Some Principals Experienced Increased Workloads as a Result of Staff Turnover in their Districts**

As a minor theme, six of 12 principals, George, Calvin, Leon, John, Ed and Frank indicated they experienced an increase in work responsibilities based on the number of staff turnovers in their district. Three principals, George, Calvin, and Leon worked in districts who were working under their second superintendent in four years. David and Frank shared stories of staff members dying during the academic year. Collectively said, regardless of a school board election, new superintendent being hired, administrators resigning, or teachers or support staff taking new jobs, being asked to resign, being terminated, the final result was predictable; in these instances, the principals were asked to take on additional work responsibilities. Some principals were asked to serve on ad-hoc committees, bond proposals, millage proposals, search
committees, curriculum committees, district safety and security task forces, or parent advisory committees, completing tasks given to former colleagues, as well as recruiting and training new staff.

As examples, Leon shared “I have worked for 5 superintendents, 3 curriculum directors and this has created a lack of consistency each time someone leaves, I am asked to serve on a search committee.” According to Calvin, we have quite a few new staff members this year too, “so that’s an increased responsibility for not only providing them their mentorship but getting a lot of their new teacher induction, as well as just additional evaluations.” Similarly, George said:

Yeah, and sometimes it’s working backwards. Because you feel like you make great strides, you have some great professional development, you have some new interventions in place, you have some new objectives in place, new strategies in place. And then you have a teacher turnover, and then you gotta back track and say, Well, we’ve done these the last two years. Our goal has been reading comprehension. Another goal has been an improvement in math proficiency.

Well, you gotta catch those new teachers or support staff up to date. And there has been staff turnover, and I would say a great deal of staff turnover.

According to George, there has been an approximately 40% turnover of teaching staff in his building in the past three years. Simultaneously, these principals are also responsible for completing all other areas of their job description. All such conditions have implications on how principals manage their time.

**Theme 11: Some Principals Expressed a Sense of Pride when Working in a District that Uses One Evaluation Model for All Educators**

While there were four different evaluation models (School Advance,5 Dimensions Plus, Marzano and McREL), four principals expressed satisfaction when their district used only one
model for all educators, including administrators in the district. As a minor theme, these principals referred to a common language, use of common rubrics and a more efficient use of their time as reasons for working with one model. These factors alone were interpreted as giving the school district a key academic advantage. On the other hand, however the principals admitted the learning curve associated with the models was time consuming and difficult. Calvin commented on the Marzano’s framework:

So, with Marzano, it is top down, to the superintendent, the principal and the teachers are all evaluated in a similar fashion with the framework. The Marzano framework has three pieces, so they all align, so we all have common language that we speak among things. As far as how their evaluation reflects on me, basically it is their data, I think is what is the biggest piece that reflects on me. Each superintendent does it differently. It depends on how the new superintendent got it lined up for us.

Harold explained how his district started using one evaluation model for all educators.

Our high school was on the PLA [Persistently Low Achieving] list quite a few years ago. This was before teacher evaluation tools were required by the state. But we rallied behind the high school being on the PLA list. We reflected you know what, that is not just a grade nine through 12 problem. We need to get together and figure this out k-12 ....

George discussed using 5D Plus as the evaluation tool for all educators in the district.

So it impacts my evaluation because they also choose 5 D plus to evaluate me. So, I am evaluated based on the successes of my teachers and our student body here. So I set goals, I have to achieve my goals, and I have to make sure our student
growth portion is there from our teaching staff to our student population, because that directly affects impacts my evaluation as a leader. So it is a domino effect. If they are successful, the teachers are successful, which means your administrators are successful.

Chapter V Summary

In summary, this chapter presented the analysis of major and minor themes created from interviews of 12 Midwestern middle school principals (see Table 15 for a summary listing). It discusses the principal’s perceptions of increased accountability for meeting federal and state mandates, student assessment, teacher evaluations, principal’s evaluations, stress, coping strategies, and the principal’s selections on Allison’s Coping Preference Scale. This information serves as a bridge to Chapter VI, which will present the findings, relationship of results to existing research, and recommendations for future studies.
Table 15

*Major and Minor Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Adam</th>
<th>Bob</th>
<th>Calvin</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Ed</th>
<th>Frank</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Harold</th>
<th>Ivan</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Kevin</th>
<th>Leon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nearly all participants have increased responsibilities to implement recent mandates</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nearly all participants indicated responsibilities had changed given testing mandates</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. All principals have complaints and stress complying with state testing mandates</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. All principals’ responsibilities increased with new teacher evaluations, but agree evaluations are now better</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Most principals reported teacher stress over evaluations, as do some administrators</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>Harold</td>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Leon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Most principals noted no real increased responsibilities or stress with principal evaluation</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. All principals identified enhanced stress beyond testing and evaluation</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Stress has a negative impact on the personal lives of many principals</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. All principals use a variety of coping strategies daily to relieve stress</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Some principals experienced increased workloads due to staff turnover in their districts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. A few principals were proud district uses one evaluation model for all educators</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15—Continued
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter addresses the research questions of my study by focusing on the themes and subthemes extrapolated from interviews of 12 Midwestern middle school principals. These principals elaborated on the affect implementing state and federal school accountability mandates had on them professionally and personally in reference to levels of stress. Additionally, the principals completed Allison’s Coping Preference Scale. Collectively, these data were triangulated with related research literature from other studies, providing a robust narrative of these middle school principals’ experiences.

Within the framework of Chapter II, I suggested the reputation of our country as a world leader in education has declined in past decades. As a result, a need for school reform became a clarion call in many quarters throughout the country, and as a response, state and federal governments passed various accountability-related mandates. Although these mandates were designed to have a favorable impact on the educational system nationwide, some collateral damage on the roles of administrators, teachers, and students may have occurred.

I also pointed out in Chapter I that there was a paucity of literature on how principals are handling increased responsibilities and pressures from accountability mandates. Hence, this study sought answers to questions about the impact of state and federal mandates on a select number of middle school principals in one Midwestern state. Furthermore, along with adding to the literature on school principals’ handling of accountability mandates, findings from this study can assist principals in planning and preparing interventions for utilizing coping mechanisms to handle stress.
Analysis of Research Questions and Connections to Previous Research

My research questions focused on the impact of state and federal mandates on the role of middle school principals, specifically what increased responsibilities and major areas of stress middle school principals are experiencing; how any enhanced stress impacts these middle school principals, both professionally and personally; and what coping mechanisms principals use to handle the stress of any increased responsibilities. As part of the interview process, principals completed Allison’s Coping Preference Scale, which also afforded an opportunity to select coping preferences they used to cope with stress.

In Chapter IV, I shared individual profile narratives for the 12 principals, including numerous direct quotes to tell their stories related to: an increase in their responsibilities and accountability as principals, student testing, teacher evaluation, principal evaluation, stress, and coping skills. In Chapter V, I used their voices to create themes and subthemes. Below is a discussion of these findings as connected to my research questions.

Research Question 1

My first question explored the extent to which state and federal accountability-related mandates impacted the traditional role of middle school principals regarding increased responsibilities. A review of the findings revealed that the majority (10 of 12) of the principals reported experiencing an increased workload as a result of complying with recent federal and state mandates (Theme 1). For example, David said, “I would have never thought in the history of my teaching where I am doing active shooter training… we did how to tighten a tourniquet… I am certified in CPR, First Aid, we are talking about Epi pens now. I guess we expect so much more from educators than what we ever did. It is unbelievable.”
For those with various federal programs (Title I, Title VI, Title IX, and others), or state-funded programs, managing the budgets and funds are dilatory, tedious, time consuming; implementing and documenting programs can also be worrisome, along with the awesome tasks of improving the school. In addition to meeting their responsibilities associated with various programs and mandates, an increase in responsibility was also felt by the principals when it came to things like answering emails, dealing with irate parents, curtailing bullying, completing paperwork, analyzing classroom practices, and more. This is similar to what had been found in DiPiaola and Tschannen-Moran’s (2003) study of principals in Virginia.

Some principals also experienced added responsibilities when there is a high turnover in teachers and administrators in their districts (Theme 10). Whether terminated or not, their departures inevitably create additional work and places a strain on the principals’ time.

Contextually, as I stated previously, “regardless of who is in control or who education is for, school principals are under enormous pressure to reform their schools in accordance with the federal and state legislative initiatives. Principals are viewed as the change agents who are primarily responsible for satisfying state superintendents, district superintendents, and governors, while simultaneously addressing the concerns of teachers, students, and parents. Therefore, the principals left little doubt that teacher supervision, teacher evaluation, and student assessments have all added to their workloads as a result of the recent state and federal mandates related to accountability.

**Research Question 2**

My second question examined the extent to which mandated student assessments influenced an increase in the responsibilities and accountability of the principals in this study. The findings revealed that virtually all the middle school principals experienced an increase in
their roles and responsibilities as a result of student testing mandates (Theme 2). Such principals experienced additional responsibilities when their districts implemented reform measures in order to increase the performance of the students.

All principals expressed specific concerns and stress over complying with the logistics of state testing mandates (Theme 3), including the length of tests; the over testing of students; that student testing protocols constantly contain moving targets; and testing is stressful for students, teachers and administrations alike. As Leon stated: “it is difficult getting students ready for a test that is constantly changing from MAP to MSTEP to PSAT to ACT. Each test measures something different and has a different protocol.”

The literature is robust with studies on testing, some offering evidence supporting standardized tests while other studies are saying just the opposite. Whether one is an opponent or proponent of standardized testing, in my study mandated student testing was found to have an impact regarding increasing the responsibilities and accountability of the participants in my study.

Moreover, my participants noted that some of their teachers are worried about testing issues as well and feel educators have little or no say-so regarding student testing matters. Simply put, if they are to maintain their jobs, they must comply with the state and federal mandates about standardized testing. As David recalled, “things are added but nothing is taken away,” implying that he has little control over the situations as dictated by the lawmakers.

All of these findings are similar to those found in a study of principals in Virginia, where they noted that biggest change they had experienced in their time as principals was due to student assessments and the role test scores now play in many reform efforts (DiPoala & Tschannnen-Moran, 2003).
Research Question 3

My research questions 3 investigated the extent to which teacher evaluations impacted the workload of the principal. There was consensus among the principals that their responsibilities have indeed increased related to teacher evaluation, but that the evaluations now being done are better than efforts in the past (Theme 4). For example, upon reflection, David shared “but I do think as far as the conversations, the feedback we give teachers, the actual observation protocols and things like that are much better than the check boxes that I remember when I first started doing them as a teacher and it was check a box, check a box check a box. Now it is no there’s rubrics, you know you are answering questions you are scripting.”

Most of my principals also report that teachers really stress over evaluations (Theme 5). The principals revealed some noteworthy concerns with respect to some teachers, namely: the distrust among some teachers who question the fairness of their evaluation, whether or not the evaluator is a principal or an assistant principal; the tense meetings with teachers who are worried about how much student achievement is figured into their evaluation is another concern, especially when it involves teachers who have not received an effective or minimally effective rating. Similar to what was reported by principals in my study, Joy (2019) also reported that teachers often see a disconnect between these scores and tangible steps toward improving their day-to-day practice.

Some principals in my study also voiced stress over teacher evaluations (Theme 5). For example, Ivan shared that:

teacher evaluations haven’t necessarily enhanced my stress but it has been felt by my staff… The reason why is when teachers are just getting to know there knew administrators, they can be anxious. How is this evaluator going to be? Is it a
gotcha type thing? In my first year or two in my previous district and in my first year here I could sense there was stress from my teachers and that could have been because of their previous evaluation process.

Overall, these principals view teacher evaluations as a tense, long, time-consuming process, with stress being an inherent part of the overall process of teacher evaluation. This is similar to the research of Superville (2018), who also reported on how teacher evaluations have fundamentally changed the role of the principals.

In the 21st century, teacher evaluation has changed dramatically as principals and teachers are held much more accountable for school improvement. Evaluation policies, evaluation tools, amount of time observing teachers, and feedback are among some of the central issues. In decades past, policies on teacher evaluation were are like a patched-work quilt in the Midwest, with poor evaluation systems for teachers in part because there was not a clear picture or definition of what an effective educator looks like since there were no universally accepted statewide standards (Brandt et al., 2007); most districts evaluated teachers primarily to help decide whether to retain or release new teachers.

In this same context, an analysis of 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 data on educator evaluation and educator effectiveness in Michigan revealed that “principals and teachers were evaluated using every kind of tool imaginable–checklists, surveys, narratives, and multiple user forms–without any identifiable standard measure of quality” (Michigan Department of Education, 2015, p. 2). It is important to note that student growth data, at this time, had no relationship to whether a teacher was viewed as highly effective, effective, minimally effective, or ineffective in their summative evaluation, and statewide, 97%-98% of all educators were rated as effective or highly effective (MDE, 2015).
My study has revealed that much of this has changed significantly for current principals and teachers. Principals in my study now carry out the evaluation of teachers using student test scores, classroom observations, and other measures. A number of the districts now use the same tool to evaluate teachers and administrators alike, a development seen as an improvement and a sense of pride by the principals (Theme 11). The following quote from Harold nicely sums up my findings related to teacher evaluations, whereby they have significantly increased principal responsibilities, that most teachers are stressed about them, but that overall, teacher evaluations are far better than in years past. He noted:

Principals are acutely aware of the impact that state mandates have on teachers.

The additional stress comes from the new mandates regarding layoff… if you are a teacher and your student data is not looking good, a 25-year teacher could end up losing their job over five-year teacher…We have to do a minimum of three full classroom observations a year, which they are usually about an hour or longer. We have to have a pre-meeting and a post-meeting with every teacher before and after the observations, and then it’s just quite a long process. I will say, though, I have had some of my best collegial conversations with teachers I have ever had in my career.

**Research Question 4**

My fourth question focused on principal evaluations and their impact on the workload of the principal. Overall, most principals voiced no real increase responsibilities or stress associated with their principal evaluations (Theme 6). The participants acknowledged that their evaluations are now aligned with the teachers’ evaluation, which is tied to the student achievement scores on the state assessments, per state and federal mandates. Thus, there is an increase in the principals’
responsibilities because legislatively their evaluations are now directly tied to student achievement, but most did not see that the principal evaluation system per se added to their workload or stress.

While most did not express increased workload, they did voice increased responsibility, as captured by George as he stated:

I understand that I’m evaluated based on the success or failure of my teachers, and our student body. So, I set goals, I have to achieve my goals, and I have to make sure the student growth portion is there, from our teaching staff to our student population, because that directly impacts my evaluation as a leader.

Similar to teacher evaluations, in years past, principal evaluations were not very robust, often conducted in a rather hurried, cursory or superficial basis. Data revealed that the state had a poor evaluation system associated with a variety of factors, using every kind of evaluation tool imaginable, unreliable state test data, unclear goals and no statewide standards are among them (Midwest Education Trust, 2011). The format and processes used in principal evaluation often varied from one district to another and that principals and superintendents frequently held different perspectives about the purposes and usefulness of evaluation. Most principals felt their evaluations were not useful and were unduly influenced by political forces beyond their control (Davis & Hensely, 1999).

Previous research reveals that principals were also struggling with numerous issues that were relevant to the evaluation process. These issues included, among other matters, the use of a wide variety of methods and measures, which raised questions about the overall quality of the evaluation process; a lack of specificity regarding which type of student achievement data should be used in principal evaluations; and a lack of consensus regarding their priority ranking of their
duties and how they perceived how their supervisors would priority rank those same duties, which could have serious consequences when it comes to their evaluations (Muenich, 2014).

In recent years, however, this situation has changed dramatically for both principals and teachers, with specific requirements now detailed in law. This Midwestern state, like some other states, has implemented an effectiveness ratings system where principals are rated on four levels: highly effective, effective, minimally effective, and ineffective. The law also requires that student growth and assessment data be factored into a principal’s effectiveness rating.

In my study, the 12 principals were evaluated using four different evaluation models, with the School Advance evaluation system used by seven school districts, the 5 Dimensions Plus (5D Plus) model and the Marzano School Leadership Evaluation Model used by two districts each, and one district used the McREL model. This is in line with recent research that had reviewed the implementation of this state’s administrator evaluation system, whereby administrators were most often evaluated using the School ADvance Administrator Evaluation System, and that 20% to 39% of their ratings was based on student data as reported by most administrators (Van Dine, Kelleman, Haines, Stewart, Underwood, Bopp, Luke, & Cherasaro, 2018).

Regardless of the evaluation tool used, however, a majority of the principals commented that it is important to have a good working and personal relationship between the principal and the superintendent; if so, then, the principal has nothing to be stressed about when it comes to principal evaluations (Theme 7). Frank commented on that relationship in the following statement:

Principal evaluations…I am going to be honest with you, it depends on the setting that you are in. I have a great relationship, working relationship, personal
relationship with our superintendent. So, I don’t get stressed about my evaluation. I hope that doesn’t sound egotistical. It’s not meant to sound a certain way. But it is to say that I believe that if there was an issue with something that I was doing or a concern with anything I have confidence and trust in my superintendent or anyone in central office that come and say, ‘Frank hey, look it, you got to get on the right track with this, right”. Because I think it’s more authentic that way. And I think we have done work as a team to minimize the stress that comes along with those.

This sentiment was shared by several other principals, and is in line with Sanders et al. (2011), who “posit trust and relationship building between superintendents and principals is possibly more important than the content of the evaluation….trust is the glue of day to day life in the supervisory partnership between the principal and the evaluator” (p. 34).

Research Question 5

Research question 5 examined the stresses principals experience in their work role. The findings revealed that all the principals identified some enhanced areas of stress that impacts their professional lives (Theme 7). For example, being unable to finish tasks before a deadline, student assessments (and their protocols), and teacher evaluations were identified by some principals to be incredibly stressful. Some stress was also experienced by principals who believed their efforts were insufficient to fully meet the needs of their students and staff.

Social media was revealed to be another source of frustration and stress for some principals, especially when bullying, fighting, lying, and sexting are involved. Communication difficulty with parents and other stakeholders causes some principals to be stressed out. Additionally, student suicides, the death of a faculty member, termination of faculty, students
with behavior problems, mental health issues, law enforcement issues, and family issues were identified by some principals as a source of their stress. Thus, comments made during the interviews, revealed that no principal was immune when it came to experiencing stress in their workplace. For example, Ivan shared “the job can create a level of stress where I may not have as much energy to work out or run. I find myself in the best shape in the summertime, when I am not experiencing stress at work. So, as much as I may say there isn’t stress, there certainly is.”

My data also revealed that such stress has a negative impact on the personal lives of many of these principals (Theme 8). High blood pressure, sleep issues, and increase in smoking were among some of issues revealed by a few principals who talked about the impact that stress has had on their physical and mental health. Other principals reported not being able to turn school off, and a few mentioned that working in stressful environments had caused them to miss work on more than one occasion due to health-related issues. Indeed, the principals reported that during the summer, when they are not working, their physical and mental health, and family relationships were much better.

There is a significant amount of previous research on stress in the workplace for school principals that align with my findings. For example, DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran’s (2003) study of principals in Virginia, also revealed stressors related to accountability as they strived to improve instructional practices, including analyzing classroom practices, and dealing with curriculum alignment, staff morale, and faculty and staff development. Ironically, these principals even reported being stressed over learning how to become a leader and how to manage stress while delivering quality services to faculty, staff, and students. They also found that the second cause of increased stress among the principals was associated with the need to engage in a variety of daily work responsibilities coupled with meeting federal, state, and local mandates.
They felt overwhelmed because they had little time left for completing paperwork, answering emails, supporting teachers, providing security, breaking up fights, curtailing bullying, and dealing with irate parents. In simple terms, Virginia’s principals represented a “profession under stress” (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 59)

A profession under stress was also found in a study by Boyland (2011) of principals in Indiana; 92% percent reported experiencing moderate or high job stress, with the number one factor being task overload in part due to increased pressure and time demands by the state and federal government. Moreover, 69% of these elementary principals claimed that job stress had a negative affected on their health and wellness (e.g., fatigue, trouble sleeping, high blood pressure, headaches, and anxiety or depression).

Indeed, Wells (2019) provides a very revealing article that reviews the research on principals and their stress levels over a period of three decades. She describes research articles from as early as the 1970s, which describe concerns for the levels of stress that principals encounter on a daily basis, noting headaches, change, conflict, and other health ailments of principals, indicating that managing personal stress was a challenge for principals.

As stated in Chapter II, school principals are leaving the profession mid-career and retiring at an increasing rate; the stress associated with changing, complex, demanding job duties could be a major contributor to this trend. Some researchers have concluded there is a high correlation between stress and burnout, which is a significant factor in the lives of school principals (Boyland, 2011, Proethoe, 2009; Zubrzycki, 2012). Such stress could help explain a growing trend among principals who are exiting the profession and retiring at mid-career throughout the country.
Research Question 6

My sixth research question considered the variety of strategies or mechanisms that principals use to cope with stress. While these has been much research on the types and amounts of stress felt by principals (as noted in the previous section), there has been less research on what such principals do to address such stress.

Overall, the principals in my study use a variety of coping strategies daily to relieve stress (Theme 9), some more frequently than others. For example, using humor, maintaining a positive attitude/mental balance, regular exercising, spending quality time with family and friends, and finding quiet time were among the strategies that they frequently used to cope with stress. Others spoke of achieving a positive attitude/mental balance, exercising, sharing leadership with faculty, networking, and professional development.

It is interesting that several principals used the implementation of important changes in the work environment as mechanisms to reduce frustration and stress. It is not uncommon, however, for one to miss or ignore such changes as stress reducing mechanisms. But, for example, it is known that an ineffective communication system or a weak network can certainly be a source of frustration and stress.

To make meaningful changes in the work place and reduce stress, some principals in my study have attempted to implement some of the following changes: (a) effective communication and technology, (b) developing an administration support team structure, (c) developing a family atmosphere among the faculty, (d) delegating and shared responsibility/leadership with faculty, (e) developing positive relationship with students, (f) professional development, and (g) network building. One can surmise that any successful implementation of an effective change would not only reduce but effectively eliminate that area as a source of stress. For example, a weak and
ineffective network transformed into an effective one would eliminate this area as a source of stress.

The responses of the 12 principals in my study confirmed the contention that stress cannot be avoided; it’s an inherent part of the role played by every principal. This group of principals has served longer than most principals with an average length of service being 10 years. Conversely, the average length of time novice principals entering the profession and remaining on the job is approximately three years. The principals in this study have found coping strategies to help them weather the stressful storms that have driven many of their fellow principals out of the profession.

Some previous research captured more general leadership-based approaches to copying. For example, Reynolds and O’Dwyer’s (2006) study of middle school principals in Massachusetts found that principals’ ability to cope with these and other stressors was positively related to effective leadership; the more principals are adequately trained in the use of coping skills, the more principals are capable of performing effective leadership; and a positive relationship exists between leadership and coping skills at both the system and individual levels. Similarly, Fullan (1998) reported that effective leaders can develop a set of strengths (i.e., coping skills) that would help principals become resilient school leaders in dealing with stress, including accurately assessing past and current reality; being positive about future possibilities; remaining true to personal values; maintaining a strong sense of self efficacy; investing personal energy wisely; and acting on the courage of personal convictions.

Being a bit more specific, Ashton and Duncan (2012) identified eight coping strategies that rural principals could use to address stress: find a mentor; develop personal resilience with healthy coping mechanisms; develop personal resilience with purpose; establish key
relationships; take the time to build rapport; infuse the vision in all actions and decisions; and schedule time for effective instructional leadership. In a similar vein, Boyland’s (2011) qualitative study of elementary principals produced these top coping methods used to manage the stress: regular exercise; leaving work on time; making time to eat during the day; not dwelling on mistakes; and journaling.

My study also captured data on specific coping strategies, using Allison’s (1997) Coping Preference Scale, which includes 26 coping items for which respondents are to identify how frequently, if at all, these do each item to relieve stress. Data from my principals revealed that all 26 items in the scale were utilized as a coping strategy at one time or another by the principals in my study, but Table 14 shows the top strategies from my 12 principals, of which there were 13 different items given ties in their means. Table 14 also shows the top 10 rated items obtained by Allison from school principals several decades ago, at a time when early state and federal accountability were just starting to be put into place (i.e., No Child Left Behind was enacted in 2001).

As can be seen in Table 16, all but two of Allison’s top strategies were also found within my study (e.g., engaging in active and less active non-work or play activities). For my principals, they identified four others that were not in Allison’s top lists, including talking to district administrators, regular physical exercise, taking mini-vacations and weekend getaways, and utilizing in-service to increase leadership. While taking mini-vacations and weekend getaways might be similar to engaging in active and less active non-work or play activities, the others are indeed different (talking to others, exercising, and utilizing in-service to increase leadership skills). Those may tell us something that the role of other administrators in a district, as well as
in-service training, and regular exercise, have become more important as coping strategies in the past two decades.

Table 16

*Top Coping Strategies (from Coping Preference Scale)*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Maintaining a sense of humor</td>
<td>1. Practicing good human relation skills with staff, students, and parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Practicing good human relation skills with others</td>
<td>2. Maintaining a sense of humor</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Approaching problems optimistically and objectively</td>
<td>3. Approaching problems optimistically and objectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Setting realistic goals and recognizing job limitations</td>
<td>4. Maintaining regular sleep habits</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Talking with family members or close friends</td>
<td>5. Setting realistic goals and recognizing job limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Engage in active non-work or play activities</td>
<td>6. Delegating responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Maintaining regular sleep habits</td>
<td>7. Talking with family members or close friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Delegating responsibility</td>
<td>8. Engaging in active non-work or play activities <em>(e.g., boating, camping, fishing, gardening or golfing)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. <em>Talking to district administrators or principals</em></td>
<td>9. Engaging in less active non-work or play activities <em>(e.g., dining out, attending cultural or sporting events or movies)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. <em>Regular physical exercise</em></td>
<td>10. Working harder, including evenings and weekends</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. <em>Taking mini-vacations &amp; weekend getaways</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. <em>Utilizing in-service to increase leadership skills</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Working harder, including evenings and weekends</td>
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*Italicized items are those that do NOT match between columns/studies.*

It should be noted that, in addition to identifying effective coping strategies, Allison (1997) also discussed principals facing increased stress as a result of the pressure for educational accountability and reform; that this increased stress had resulted in poor health for some school administrators; and that stressors had lead professional associations and school districts to implement programs to teach school administrators about health and wellness programs that
include coping skills. This was over 20 years ago, and yet it sounds much like I heard in my interviews.

It is interesting to note that Allison (1997) noted that the identified top 10 strategies were not only preferred, but also perceived as the most effective. I found this instructive because, though the ordering differed slightly, there is great overlap in these top strategies between my study and that of Allison. While one might be tempted to conclude that the most used strategies are effective in dealing with stress, I did not specifically collect data on the effectiveness of each copying strategy in that instrument. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to speculate about the efficacy (effectiveness) of one coping strategy over another. From my study, I have no evidence that would allow me to conclude that, for example, “maintain a sense of humor” has greater efficacy than “withdraw physically from the situation.” What I do feel safe to advance, though, is that the principals in this study are under stress and they have utilized a variety of coping strategies that have enabled them to maintain their principal’s position that exceeds the average length of tenure of most principals in this state or the country as whole. These principals have been in their position for an average of 10 years, versus the four-year average for most principals (Learning Policy Institute, 2019).

Overall, information from my study has made it very clear that principals are experiencing stress as a result of the state and federal mandates related to accountability. Such stress is manifested when there is an increase in their workloads especially when it comes to student assessments and teacher evaluations, per the mandates to reform education in this country. These 12 principles are experiencing stress in their personal as well as their professional life. Yet, all are using a number of coping strategies, and although mandate streamlining and/or
additional resources are still needed, most shared that good things are happening for teachers and students as a result of these mandates.

**Overall Summary of Themes and Previous Research Connections**

Table 17 summarizes the major findings in my study as they relate to the previous research literature.

**Some Important Limitations of This Study**

Regarding this study’s limitations, it was clear that during the interview phase, the principals were not forthcoming to discuss the stress and strain caused by their daily work activities. Contextually, most principals tried to give the impression they had very little to stress over. While some principals did not hesitate to share stories about situations in which their private lives were affected by work-related stress. There was a group of principals who did not share any personal information. That said, there are several important limitations of this study that strongly suggest a need for a larger, more comprehensive study.

Specifically, generalizing the findings of this study should be done cautiously, if at all, because of the following important limitations: a) the study was limited to a convenient sample of 12 principals, b) neither public charter schools, parochial schools, elementary schools, nor high schools were part of this study, and c) only a small male sample means there was an absence of diversity with respect to race, age, and ethnicity in this study. Moreover, since this study focused only on public middle school principals in one geographical area of the state, findings from other geographical areas may differ significantly from those in this study. Thus, any attempt to generalize the herein findings should be done with that limitation in mind.
### Table 17

**Summary of Research Findings as Related to Previous Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calbert (2020) Findings/Themes</th>
<th>Previous Research Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Nearly all principals experienced an increase in their responsibilities for implementing federal and state mandates</td>
<td>Affirms DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003), and others that mandates have placed additional burdens on principal as they are held accountable for reforming public education in this country.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 2: The vast majority of principals indicated that their roles and responsibilities changed under the federal and state testing mandates</td>
<td>Affirms Joy (2019), Yeh (2005), Superville (2018), and others clearly support a finding that mandates related to student testing have changed significantly the role of the principal.</td>
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<td>Theme 3: All principals have complaints and stress complying with state testing mandates.</td>
<td>Affirms much literature on the impact of mandated student testing, although limited info on principals’ stress.</td>
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<td>Theme 4: All principals’ responsibilities increased meeting mandates regarding teacher evaluations, but agree evaluations are now better.</td>
<td>Affirms Brandt et al. (2007), Superville (2018), Muenich, (2014), Davis and Henley (1999), and others that principals have increased responsibilities with new teacher evaluations. Adds new finding that despite more work, evaluations are now much better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5: Most principals reported teachers stress over evaluations and, in some cases, the administrators as well, but to a far less degree.</td>
<td>Affirms Boyland (2011), Superville (2018), Joy (2009) and other researchers who have shown stress to be a problem for educators regarding their evaluations.</td>
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<td>Theme 6: Only a few principals voiced increased responsibilities or stress associated with principal evaluations</td>
<td>Contradicts Wells (2019) and other researchers who found an increase in both responsibilities and stress associated with principal evaluations</td>
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<td>Theme 7: All middle school principals identified some enhanced areas of stress beyond testing and evaluations</td>
<td>Affirms DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003), Klocko and Wells (2015), and others that find the environment in which principals work is fraught with many stressors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 8: Stress has a negative impact on the personal lives of principals</td>
<td>Affirms Wells (2019), Boyland (2011) and others that reveal the injurious impact that stress can have on the life of a principal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 10: Some principals experienced increased workloads as a result of staff turnover in their districts</td>
<td>No research was found on this particular topic, but the literature affirms increased workloads of principals related to new teacher induction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 11: Some principals expressed a sense of pride when working in a district that uses one evaluation model for all educators</td>
<td>No previous research was found to support that some principals voiced a sense of pride in the use of unified evaluation model for both teachers and principals.</td>
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Implications for Future Studies

Allison’s (1997) seminal study helped to shape my thinking about what can be done in a future study to help principals in their challenge to ameliorate their stress. Contextually, I was impressed with Allison’s thoughtful recommendations that could be helpful to front liners in their efforts to reduce stress. Two of his conclusions and a recommendation stood out to me as being especially relevant for my study. First, in his conclusion Allison stated that “…it can be concluded that principals who have more extensive coping repertoires are more likely to be in better health and experience lower levels of stress and it can also be concluded that if principals’ coping repertoires are increased, the effect of work-related stress for school administrators is also likely to decline” (p. 52). Second, in his recommendations he stated that “It is recommended that all principals, through regular annual professional development activities, become knowledgeable and skillful in applying various coping strategies” (p. 52).

The above statement places an emphasis on extensive coping repertoires with respect to the principals’ well-being, and stress reduction. While I do not wish to argue or challenge the statement or the conclusion in Allison’ (1997) study, I do have some concerns because an analysis of the findings in my study led me to conclude that the sheer number of stress-reducing strategies (i.e., coping repertoires) need not be an important determinant in the reduction of stress. Going further, the efficacy of a larger number of strategies may be no more efficient in reducing stress than a lesser number of strategies. Nonetheless, the recommendations in Allison’s study have the potential of being beneficial to those principals seeking means to reduce the stress they are experiencing.

While these and similar recommendations found in the literature could be extremely helpful to administrators, I am keenly aware that there is no ready-to-fit formula for any one
person in all situations. Thus, there is no precise set of coping strategies that will enable a principal to be successful in ameliorating stress. That said, I think principals would benefit more from an empirically based, well-crafted guide that could be utilized before a potentially particular situation becomes stressful. It is with this thought in mind that I am recommending that a large empirical study be conducted with its central goal being the production of a “Stress Reduction Guide for Middle School Principals.”

I would like to think that such a guide would provide principals with best-practice coping strategies for handling specific situations that have the potential of producing stress. In other words, the guide would allow a principal to (a) identify the occurrence of a particular problematic situation(s), and (b) find a similar or identical situation(s) in the guide that has been successfully handled using a specific strategy or set of strategies. I think that such a guide would be invaluable to principals who, according to the findings of this and other studies, will undoubtedly encounter enhanced responsibilities and stress on a relentless basis in the foreseeable future.

Finally, I am confident that we have the scholars who are capable of skillfully crafting such a guide from the data of a large empirical study that is methodologically framed to collect greater details from principals about (a) actual circumstances faced by principals, specific situational factors producing stress; (b) their specific techniques/strategies used in addressing specific stressful situations; (c) the outcomes attributed to specific techniques or strategies utilized; and (d) the degree of that success. Additionally, this larger study should be more inclusive regarding an appropriate sample size, characteristics of the work environment, family variables, gender, race/ethnicity, student population size, urban/rural distribution, pertinent qualitative variables, and more.
In this context, a primary aim of this study should seek answers to the following questions: What was the specific nature of the situation or circumstance that caused the stress? What was the level of stress experienced—high or low? What was the duration of the stress? Temporary or on-going? What specific strategy or mechanism was used to reduce the stress encountered in a particular situation or circumstance? What was the outcome or results when a particular strategy or a combination of strategies were used? In hindsight, what other options could you or would you have used, if any?

Finally, I recommend that all colleges and universities that are engaged in the instruction and training of school administrators provide a curriculum that incorporates realistic and meaningful experience on the type and range of stressors and the relevant coping strategies that are known to effectively handle stress, coupled with the involvement of experienced principals in the educational process.

Closing Thoughts

Arguably, state and federal educational mandates will not vanish any time soon in any state in the U.S. Therefore, the enormity of the task of reforming our educational system, whether it be at the elementary level, the middle school level, or the high school level, will not get easier in the foreseeable future. That being the case, we should pursue every effort to help those on the frontline—teachers and principals—succeed in an environment characterized as being very challenging, pressurized, and relentlessly stressful.

To this end, this study is one of value for a number of reasons, namely: the study confirmed that, as noted in the research literature, the principal profession in this country is indeed a very stressful and difficult one; it contributes to the scarce literature on the accountability-related responsibilities and associated stress of principals in the middle school
environment; and it provides a fuller understanding of how a limited number of principals
perceive their work environment as related to state and federal mandates regarding student
testing, teacher evaluation, and principal evaluation. It also informs the reader about the stresses
that principals are under and some of their stressors; knowing how they handled such stress is
important, as well as instructive.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A

Administrator Initial E-mail Invitation to Participate
Appendix A

Administrator Initial E-mail Invitation to Participate

Date: [Date Sent]

Dear [Name of Administrator]

My name is Gus Calbert, I am a graduate student pursuing a Ph.D. degree in Educational Leadership from Western Michigan University. I am researching any increased principal responsibilities as a result of recent federal and state accountability mandates, and any connected stress and coping skills being used. As a former middle school principal with experience gained from working in rural, suburban and urban school systems, I believe middle school principals work in the most challenging, yet rewarding, K-12 positions.

If you have been a principal for at least three years, I am inviting you to participate in this qualitative research study. I received your name from either the president of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association or the State of Michigan Department of Education directory.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview with me (at a location of your choosing), and during that time also complete a short coping skills assessment. Together the interview and assessment will take less than 60 minutes.

With the goal of creating the most accurate story possible, you would then receive a copy of the transcribed interview and given an opportunity to add and/or correct any information that you had provided. If you choose to review this information, it should take you about 15-20 minutes.

Please contact me by [specific date] if you are willing to participate. Also, if you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by my email address gus.t.calbert@wmich.edu or by phone at 269-910-9211.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of participating in this study telling the story of middle school principals working in West Michigan.
Appendix B

Coping Preference Scale
### Coping Preference Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Skills</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Set realistic goals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Delegate responsibility</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Maintain a sense of humor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Withdraw physically from a situation (leave the office or school for a time)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Engage in <em>active</em> non-work or play activities (e.g. boating, camping,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fishing, gardening, golfing, painting, playing a musical instrument, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Practice good human relation skills with staff, students, and parents.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Work harder (including evenings and weekends)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Engage in activities that support spiritual growth (inspirational music,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>art, reading, or religion).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Maintain good healthy habits (e.g., watch weight, eat balanced meals,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reduce intake of caffeine and refined sugars, keep proper concentrations of vitamins, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Prioritize and use time management techniques (i.e., management by</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objectives, setup blocks of time for specific activities, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Talk with family members or close friends.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Engage in <em>less active</em> non-work or play activities (e.g., dine out,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attend cultural or sporting events, movies, crafts, listen to music, read</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or watch TV. etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Skills</td>
<td>Almost Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Almost Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Maintain regular sleep habits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Break from daily routine or temporarily change to a less stressful task.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Talk to other administrators or school principals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Community involvement (e.g., coaching, service club membership, volunteering, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Approach problems optimistically and objectively.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Regular physical exercise (e.g., aerobics, athletics, bicycling, fitness club, jogging, skiing, swimming, tennis, walking, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Use relaxation and stress management techniques (e.g., auto-hypnosis, biofeedback, mediation, yoga, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Compartmentalize work and non-work life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Establish office procedures so that visitors are screened (limit “open door policy”)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Create more positive and self-supportive mental sets (e.g., use positive self-talk, recognize pros as well as cons, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Take mini-vacations (e.g., weekends Away, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Seek solitude, slow down work place, take time to reflect.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Socializing (e.g., lunch with others, playing cards, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Utilize in-service opportunities to increase repertoire of management and communication skills.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Principal Interview Protocol
Principal Interview Protocol

Project: Experiences of Middle School Principals with Accountability, Stress, and Coping Skills

Interview Start Time: _______________________________________________________
Interview End Time: _______________________________________________________ 
Date of Interview: _________________________________________________________ 
Location: __________________________________________________________________ 
Interviewer: __________________________________________________________________ 
Participant # and code: ____________________________________________________ 

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about your experiences as a middle school principal.

1. Let’s begin this conversation with you briefly sharing some of your experience as an educator.

   How long have you been a principal?
   Why did you choose to become a principal?

2. Before we continue with further interview questions, please take a few minutes to complete this short coping skills assessment. There are no right or wrong answers, but I’d like you to complete this now so that we can revisit it at the end of our interview. [Take 5-8 minutes for principal to complete the assessment]

3. Given fairly recent state and federal accountability mandates, what increased responsibilities have you experienced during the past few years in reference to:
   - student testing?
   - school accountability?
   - teacher evaluations?
   - principal evaluations?
• other accountability related experiences?

4. Given any additional responsibilities, can you describe any increased stress you have experienced in the past few years related to:

• student testing?
• teacher evaluations?
• principal evaluations?
• other accountability – related expectations?

5. Okay, we have covered the larger accountability – related issues. Now I want you to describe how the environment you described above has affected your relationships with:

• Teachers and other employees in the district?
• Students parents and others in the community?
• Your ability to be a leader at work?

6. How has the stress you described in your work environment affected you in the following areas?

• Affected you personally?
• Affected your physical health?
• Affected your mental health?
• Affected your relationship with your family?

7. The next set of questions look at how stress maybe influencing your behavior on a professional level. Specifically, how has working in the environment you described above affected your relationships with teachers and other employees in the school and district?

Affected your relationship with students, parents, and others in the community? Affected your
ability to be a strong leader in your school? Any other stress impacts on you professionally not already mentioned?

8. On a more personal level how has working in the environment you described above affected you **personally**?

   your physical health?
   your mental health?
   your relationship with your family?
   Any other stress impacts on you personally not mentioned above?

9. Now let’s change the conversation from talking about stress to talking about coping skills. Please take a moment and reflect on your responses to the school environment you described within the context of a normal, abnormal, and horrific day as it relates to additional accountability-related responsibilities:

   What coping skills do you utilize on a normal day?
   What coping skills do you utilize on an abnormal day?
   What coping skills do you utilize on a horrific day?

10. What coping skills do you utilize as you deal with additional accountability-related responsibilities and associated stress to student testing, teachers evaluations, principal evaluations and other accountability issues?

11. Please take a moment and reflect on the coping strategies survey you completed at the beginning of the interview. Thinking about what you selected, do you want to share any information about the coping skills that you use most frequently and why?

    In closing, is there any additional information you would like to share regarding any additional responsibilities or stress related to enhanced accountability issues, and how you best cope with such stress professionally and personally?

Thank you.
Appendix D

Principal Consent Form
Principal Consent Form

**Principal Investigator:**  Louann Bierlein Palmer, Ed.D.

**Student Investigator:**  Gus Calbert

**Title of Study:**  Experiences of Middle School Principals with Accountability Stress and Coping Skills

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled Experiences of Middle School Principals with Accountability, Stress, and Coping Skills. This project will serve as Gus Calbert’s dissertation project fulfilling the requirements for the doctorate in educational leadership. This consent agreement will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?** The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the shared experiences of middle school principals given a contextual environment of high accountability and potentially high stress. Furthermore, to explore how such stress might impact principals professionally and personally, and the use of coping skills on a professional and personal level.

**Who can participate in the study?** Michigan Middle School Principals working on the West side of the state with three years’ experience as a principal.

**Where will the study take place?** The survey and face to face interview will take place in the principal’s school or district or some other mutually agreed upon place.

**What is the time commitment for participating in the study?** Part one of the study is completion of Allison Coping Preference Scale (1997). The completion of this survey should
take 6 to 8 minutes. The second part of this study is to complete a one to one interview with Gus Calbert. The semi-structured interview will take between 45-60 minutes. The interview will be recorded for accuracy. After the transcription has been completed you will be emailed a copy of the interview to edit. This procedure should take approximately 15-20 minutes.

**What will you be asked to do if you chose to participate in the study?** While participating in this study, you will be asked multiple open ended questions about leading a school on a normal, abnormal and a horrific day. You will also be asked about the triggers that cause you the most stress on your job? You will be asked about what coping skills you utilize and how effective are the coping skills? You will also be asked about how the stress from your work environment affects you on a personal and professional level. Finally, you will be asked to describe how the stress and strain from your job affects your relationships with various stakeholders.

**What information is being measured during this study?** On Allison’s Coping Preference Scale your responses to the questions on stress and coping skills. During the interview, your responses to the open ended questions will be tape recorded. I will also be taking field notes during the interview.

**What are the risks of participating in this study?** There are no risk to you as being placed in any dangerous environment. However, there are limited risk to you as you are a participant in this study, as certain questions within the interview may be of a sensitive nature.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?** The benefits to participating in this study are you are able to talk about your experiences and your job. Understanding how middle school principals are coping with job related stress can provide insight for job satisfaction, self-efficacy and longevity on the job.
Are there any costs associated participating in this study? There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study? There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected in the study? There are limited persons who have access to this study. Those persons are my transcriptionist, Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer and myself. The results of this study will be presented in the form of a dissertation. Each person who participates will have their identity kept confidential by referring to Principal 1, Principal 2, and so on.

What if you want to stop participating in this study? You can choose to stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop participation. You will experience no consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the lead, investigator, Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer at (269) 387-3596, or email l.bierleinpalmer@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional review Board at (269) 387-8239, or the Vice President for Research at (269) 387-8298, if questions arise during the course of the study. The consent documents have been approved for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.
I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to participate in this study.

______________________________________________________________________________

Please Print Your Name

______________________________________________________________________________

Participants Signature                                           Date
Appendix E

HSIRB Approval
Date: April 11, 2018

To: Louann Bierlein Palmer, Principal Investigator
    Gus Calbert, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 18-03-02

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Middle School Principals Experiences with Accountability Stress and Coping Skills” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study.”) Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: April 10, 2019