Experiences of Suburban and Rural High School Principals Who Have Attained Longevity in the Position: A Qualitative Study

Peggy A. Mathis
Western Michigan University, pmathis@newago.net

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations
Part of the Educational Administration and Supervision Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/113

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
EXPERIENCES OF SUBURBAN AND RURAL HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS WHO HAVE ATTAINED LONGEVITY IN THE POSITION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

Peggy A. Mathis

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
Advisor: Sue Poppink, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 2012
Today’s school leaders face many challenges. There is a renewed need to look at principal’s job satisfaction and longevity given recent trends in burnout, increased accountability, and a shortage of qualified candidates. There are conflicting demands on high school principals’ time and capacity. These leaders still have the traditional responsibilities of ensuring a safe environment, managing a budget, and maintaining discipline. Higher expectations for student success have brought with them an increase in school program expectations (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

The job of the principal has changed throughout the years (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; White-Smith & White, 2009). The shift from manager to instructional leader, along with an increase in responsibilities has made the job more challenging (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003). Research also shows that not as many educators aspire to the position of high school principal, and when they do become a building leader, they tend to not stay for an extended length of time (Gajda & Militello, 2008).

This qualitative study examines the experiences of 12 Michigan high school principals who have been a building principal for at least five years. This
phenomenological study was designed to find out what experiences high school principals describe as contributing or detracting from their job satisfaction as well as what factors contribute to or threaten their longevity.

Findings include that principals find satisfaction in working with and influencing students, leading and managing change, and they enjoy doing an important and challenging job. Factors that detract from satisfaction include negative adult behaviors, lack of support and trust, and the time commitment to do the job. New findings from this study point to the fact that principals enjoy empowering others and developing leaders to help meet the challenges present in today’s educational environment. A new finding with regard to job dissatisfaction includes the fact that principals do not enjoy dealing with negative teacher and adult behaviors. Finally, multiple factors were reported as contributing to longevity in the position, some of which include school board, community, central office, staff, and collegial support.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

I must first acknowledge the one who has immensely blessed me. He gave me wisdom and perseverance to complete this project and much glory and honor go to Him.

I need to thank the multitude of educators that I have had the privilege to work with in my capacity as an administrator. The work we do in education is so important and I express gratitude to all of my former and present coworkers for their support and inspiration.

Thank you to the participants in my study. I was able to engage in deep conversation with passionate educators who really care about kids and where the future of education is headed. Thank you very much for allowing me to learn from you and be inspired by you.

To my advisor, Dr. Sue Poppink, and those that served on my committee, Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer and Dr. Peggy Thelen. To Dr. Poppink for the feedback and the ability to provide timely words of encouragement exactly when I needed it. Thank you to Dr. Bierlein Palmer for challenging me to expand my thinking and writing, and to Dr. Thelen for being a positive, encouraging influence. I feel honored to have had all three of these committee members to work with in this process.

Next, I need to thank my family. There are many siblings, in-laws, and other relatives that could be mentioned. Know that your supportive words are all appreciated. My Mom and Dad instilled a great value of education and relentless work ethic in me and
for that I am grateful. This wouldn’t be complete without a special mention of my father, Ken Thelen, who passed away four months before he could see me finish. I know he’s above smiling and proud of me, nonetheless.

Finally, I need to express sincere gratitude to my husband, Mark, who has been incredibly patient and supportive throughout the entire process. He provided me with adequate time, encouragement and reinforcement when it was needed. An accomplished writer himself, I benefitted from his editorial and proofreading skills. My son Conner and daughter Kendall are also worthy of recognition. They both understood the copious amounts of “homework” I had to complete. I hope my hard work is an example to them and reminds them that effort can make almost anything possible.

Peggy A. Mathis
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................................................. ii
LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................................... viii
LIST OF FIGURES ..................................................................................................................... ix

CHAPTER
I. INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................... 1
   Background ............................................................................................................................. 4
   Significance of Principal Position ....................................................................................... 4
   Principal Candidate Pools .................................................................................................... 5
   Job Satisfaction and Longevity ............................................................................................ 7
   Challenges Facing School Leaders .................................................................................... 8
   Problem Statement .............................................................................................................. 9
   Study Purpose and Research Questions ............................................................................. 10
   Conceptual Framework ....................................................................................................... 10
   Chapter I Summary ............................................................................................................. 14

II. LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................................................... 15
   Importance of the High School Principal ......................................................................... 15
   Principal Is Pivotal in Restructuring High School ............................................................ 18
   Increase in High School Principal Responsibilities .......................................................... 19
   Decrease in Candidate Pool ............................................................................................... 23
   Principal Burnout .............................................................................................................. 27
Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

Longevity ......................................................................................................................... 30
Job Satisfaction ................................................................................................................ 33
Satisfied Workers Perform at Higher Levels ................................................................. 40
Chapter II Summary ....................................................................................................... 43

III. METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................... 45
Research Design ............................................................................................................. 46
Participant Selection ....................................................................................................... 47
Data Collection Methods and Procedures ..................................................................... 50
Instrumentation .............................................................................................................. 51
Data Analysis .................................................................................................................. 53
The Researcher ................................................................................................................. 55
Chapter III Summary ..................................................................................................... 56

IV. FINDINGS ............................................................................................................... 57
Overview of Methodology .............................................................................................. 58
Participants ..................................................................................................................... 58
Themes ............................................................................................................................. 62
Themes Related to Research Question One .................................................................. 65
Theme 1: Working with and Influencing Students ....................................................... 65
Theme 2: Leading and Managing Change ..................................................................... 73
Theme 3: Doing a Challenging and Important Job ....................................................... 83
Themes Related to Research Question Two ................................................................. 88
# Table of Contents—Continued

## CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Negative Adult Behaviors</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5: Bureaucracy and Mandates</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 6: Lack of Support/Trust</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 7: Time Commitment</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes Related to Research Question Three</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 8: Factors Influencing Longevity</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV Summary</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## V. DISCUSSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Major Findings</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1 Major Findings</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2 Major Findings</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 3 Major Findings</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Findings in the Context of Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Educational Leaders</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Future Research</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## REFERENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Initial Email Script Sent to Potential Participants</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Consent Form</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDICES

C. Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval ........................................... 162

D. Interview Guide ........................................................................................................... 164
LIST OF TABLES

1. Age of Participants................................................................. 59
2. Size of Buildings in Which Participants Work ................................ 59
3. Highest Level of Education Attainment .......................................... 60
4. Years of Experience.................................................................... 61
5. Distribution of Themes.................................................................. 64
6. Findings....................................................................................... 120
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Conceptual framework................................................................. 12

2. Toward a conceptual framework for job satisfaction for suburban and rural high school principals................................................................. 130
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Education in the United States has been a topic of discussion, research, and transition for the past several years. There has been no other time in our country’s history where the world has been changing at such a rapid pace. Consequently, the education of our nation’s children is under constant scrutiny. Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), many lawmakers, business leaders, and educators are examining ways to better prepare our students for the future.

Much of the recent focus in the state of Michigan has been on secondary schools. The world in which our youth must learn, grow, and eventually emerge as adults is very different from the world experienced by every generation before them. Global connectivity, engagement, and interdependence are quickly redefining what it will take for new generations of Americans to compete and thrive economically, socially, and personally (Museus, Harper, & Nichols, 2010). In response, Michigan’s secondary education is being redefined with more rigorous academic standards and more relevant learning experiences that help students prepare for and relate to the reality of the new world order.

The Michigan Legislature, Governor, State Board, and State Superintendent have embraced the notion of rigor, relevance and relationships, and high school redesign first offered by Daggett (2000). More recently, Bill Gates (2009) has advocated for the
redesign of secondary education by enhancing teaching and learning in classrooms, along with commitments to common state standards.

Michigan’s secondary schools are expected to re-frame and reform their programs, curriculum, and delivery systems to achieve this new agenda. To accomplish the task, schools will need to retool for the meaningful integration of technology into the process of teaching and learning. They will need to adapt to new curricular expectations with increased graduation requirements for all students. At the same time, they will need to continue looking for ways to increase success for the growing numbers of students with poor support structures, and a myriad of other negative social factors (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Finally, schools must recognize and combat parent, student, and even educator apathy, and address factors that make educating children a daunting task in the current social and economic environment (Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010).

Michigan’s secondary schools must also respond to the decline in public confidence in our educational system. Lucio, Rapp-Paglicci, and Rowe (2010) state that the current status of K-12 education in the United States is alarming. Annual reports of persistently high drop-out and failure rates for segments of Michigan’s students make great headlines and perpetuate an image that the current educational system is failing to live up to the challenge of adapting to the 21st century. Meanwhile, despite herculean efforts to raise student achievement and deliver more in the way of educational opportunity amidst a steep decline in funding support, local schools are lucky to find a spot buried deeply in the daily newspaper or in the back stories of the nightly news.

Sweeping changes are occurring at all levels of Michigan’s educational system (as they are across the United States), particularly in grades 9 through 12. High school
graduates who intend to pursue jobs in traditional Michigan industries will have more difficulty securing employment without levels of post-secondary training and education than workers of previous generations. At the same time, employment prospects in Michigan’s traditional industrial base are rapidly disappearing, while it is still unclear what new industries or enterprises will take their place and provide Michigan the jobs of the future. Michigan development planners must realize that it is essential to have a diversified employment mix for long-term economic health (Jacobs, 2009). These factors have been the impetus for a recent focus on high schools, secondary school teachers, and the principals who lead those schools.

Teachers and principals are being encouraged by the Michigan State Superintendent of Schools, Mike Flanagan, to “re-imagine” their schools and their work as educators. Flanagan (2009) states, “We must set our goals high and challenge every student to surpass them. We have to get out of this old way of thinking and create a ‘New Normal’” (paragraph 3). To achieve this, building principals are expected to be strategic, informed, and innovative leaders who can martial the collective energy and resources of the school to make this happen. Researchers generally characterize the principal as the linchpin for success in any school change initiative (Cuban, 2004; Fullan, 2001). The pressure is on for Michigan’s secondary schools to lead the march toward economic renewal and resurgence, and secondary school principals are at the forefront of that march.

With the increased expectations of schools to deliver more for students and families, coupled with our nation’s uncertain economic times, it is important to study
school leadership and the people who occupy the position as a building principal. Now let us turn outline the focus of this study.

**Background**

**Significance of Principal Position**

The high school principalship is an important position. The role of the principal as instructional leader is a relatively new concept that emerged in the early 1980s, influenced largely by research that found effective schools usually had principals who stressed the importance of leadership in this area through their work (Brookover & Lezotte, 1982).

Accordingly, the role of the school leader is complex (Parkes & Thomas, 2007). Principals serve in diverse roles with conflicting demands. They must be active and effective managers while having foresight and methods to facilitate change. A principal must be an encourager, a manager of conflict, and a strong decision-maker. At times, it seems the principal’s role is ever-changing.

The job of a high school principal is a very complex and demanding and there are many constituents to whom the high school principal must answer. The principal must maintain a safe and secure learning environment for all students. The principal is responsible for the achievement of all learners no matter what their background and aspirations are. Parents, with their increased expectations, create another set of challenges for principals. School boards and superintendents expect the building principal to implement all district policies and initiatives. Teachers in the building rely heavily on the principal for structure, support, leadership, and guidance. Tirozzi (2001) stated that more
often than not, the brunt of the burden for school improvement and school accreditation falls squarely on the shoulders of the building principal.

With the recent reform efforts, the principal’s responsibility for increased student achievement has risen (Fink & Resnick, 2001; McAdams, 1998). Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) completed a meta-analysis and demonstrated that there is a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement. Their meta-analysis of a significant body of research isolated 21 characteristics of the work of a principal that show positive correlations to raising student achievement; they found seven of those 21 correlate positively with leading a school through second order, or deep, change that challenges prevailing norms of thinking and practice.

It has been established that to sustain any positive change in education the building principal is key to making that change. Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution is a report published in 1996 by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. One conclusion in this report singles out the principal as the pivotal person in restructuring a high school. According to school reformers, the chance of realizing high school improvement without the leadership of the principal is slim at best (Holland, 1997).

**Principal Candidate Pools**

The sharp increase in administrative responsibilities, coupled with the highly visible accountability pressures related to federal and state mandates, has contributed to a decrease in the candidate pool for the high school principal position (Kersten & Kersten, 2006). Additionally, the new high school graduation requirements adopted in Michigan in 2006 are among the most rigorous in the nation. Twenty-one states have set their high
school graduation requirements that would ensure college and career readiness for all students (Achieve, 2010). Michigan was one of the first states to join this trend.

Papa (2007) found that schools with higher proportions of at-risk students and less-qualified teachers are disadvantaged with regard to their ability to retain and attract principals. Yerkes and Guaglianone (1998) pointed to several factors that make the principalship highly stressful. These include long hours, unending supervision of evening activities, enormous loads of paperwork, increasingly complex society and social problems, and minimal pay differences between top teachers and administrators. These are just some of the factors that discourage educators from aspiring to be a principal.

Hartle and Thomas (2004) contend that there is a leadership crisis characterized by falling numbers of applicants for school leadership posts. If a leadership succession strategy is not implemented, the question emerges as to where the next school leaders will come from. In many schools, succession planning for continuity or changes takes place informally, or not at all. The principal applicant pool suffers yet another drop due to this lack of succession planning.

Whitaker (1996) described burnout as an extreme form of role-specific alienation, high emotional exhaustion, feelings of depersonalization, and low feelings of accomplishment. Maslach (1982) pointed out that burnout may develop if work is unchallenging and unrewarding and lacking in positive feedback and recognition. Therefore, one challenge associated with attracting and retaining educational leaders to the principal position is to examine burnout and job satisfaction as it relates to recruitment, preparation, and longevity as a principal.
Job Satisfaction and Longevity

Chambers (1999) stated that job satisfaction is considered an important and desirable goal for organizations because satisfied workers perform at higher levels than those who are not satisfied. Job satisfaction has been defined as a positive emotional state resulting from an appraisal of one’s job (Locke, 1976). It may be concluded then, that people who are experiencing a high degree of job satisfaction typically remain in a position because the elements of burnout and factors that contribute to burnout are most likely not present. Success in recruiting qualified and high quality candidates to the principal position may also be linked to the general level of job satisfaction among principals already practicing in the field.

Studies on job satisfaction have been conducted since Locke’s seminal work was published and job satisfaction has been studied in many careers. Organizations with more satisfied employees tend to be more effective than organizations with less satisfied employees (Ostroff, 1992). Peterson and Kelley (2001) described some approaches used by districts to enhance the satisfaction of principals which in turn increases the productivity of the principal. One approach is to provide adequate professional development for principals. For example, allowing principals to network with other practitioners facilitates knowledge and resource sharing, since budget considerations typically do not allow for additional administrative staff for building leaders. Establishing mentoring relationships between new and experienced principals can help ease the burden of the building leader and lead to a more satisfied condition.
Challenges Facing School Leaders

There is a renewed need to look at principals’ job satisfaction and longevity given recent trends in burnout, increased accountability, and a shortage of qualified candidates. Education is going through a great deal of change in our country on several levels. Teachers are asked to do more than ever before. Many parents are absent in the lives of their children, while others are extreme in their demands for higher test scores and achievement. Today’s school leader faces many difficult challenges (Eller, 2010). The pressures are exacerbated in Michigan with the newly implemented and much more rigorous high school graduation requirements for all students beginning with the Class of 2011.

The Educational Research Service, along with the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, documented a growing shortage of qualified candidates for the high school principalship in nearly all school districts in the United States (Houston, 1998; Protheroe, 2001; Young & McLeod, 2001). Teachers are choosing to stay in their role of teacher or leave education altogether. The number of teachers aspiring to be administrators has decreased over the last several years. The lack of a pay differential combined with a substantial increase in work hours and increased responsibilities are factors that discourage professionals from going into the principal field.

Being an effective building manager was once sufficient to be considered an effective principal. Today, principals still have the traditional responsibilities of ensuring a safe environment, managing a budget, and maintaining discipline. However, higher expectations for student success have brought with them an increase in school program
expectations (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). This means the principal must enforce new policies, create new procedures, provide support for additional services, and supervise more people. Other non-instructional obligations such as home-school communication and greater professional accountability have also contributed to the responsibilities of the principal.

As principals attempt to reconcile diverse responsibilities within a context of increasingly critical constituencies, tensions arise (Hughes, 1999). The scarcity in principal candidates indicates that people are reluctant to aspire to a position that is increasingly difficult to perform. The tug between the roles of the manager of a school and the leader of a school also presents challenges for principals. Many are calling for strong instructional leadership and higher student performance from principals. Principals are not placing these activities at the top of their daily and weekly routines, in part because they are less clear about what is expected of them as compared to more managerial, reactive activities (Donaldson & Hausman, 1999).

**Problem Statement**

Research shows that the job of the principal has changed throughout the years (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Hallinger, 1992; White-Smith & White, 2009). The shift from manager to instructional leader, along with an increase in responsibilities has made the job more challenging (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998). Research also shows that not as many educators aspire to the position of high school principal and when they do become a high school building leader, they tend to not stay for an extended length of time (Gajda & Militello, 2008; Norton, 2002). Teachers are choosing to stay in the classroom instead of striving for a principalship in an
era of high stakes accountability for building leaders (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005). What research has not shown is why high school principals, who do attain longevity in the job, stay in the position for multiple years.

**Study Purpose and Research Questions**

This qualitative study examines the experiences of 12 Michigan high school principals who have been a building principal for at least five years. It is important to gain an understanding of their ability to thrive in the position for an extended period of time. The lens used to examine these concepts was the Situational Occurrences Theory of Job Satisfaction (Quarstein, McAfee, & Glassman, 1992), and Glisson and Durick’s (1988) Predictors of Job Satisfaction. I wanted to develop an understanding of what these individuals find satisfying about their job.

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions are examined:

1. What experiences in their work do high school principals describe as contributing to their job satisfaction?
2. What experiences do principals describe as impeding or detracting from their job satisfaction?
3. How do principals explain their longevity in the job—what are the factors that contribute to their longevity and what are the factors, if any, that detract or threaten their longevity?

**Conceptual Framework**

In the literature, there are different ways that the concept of job satisfaction is categorized and described. Thompson, McNamara, and Hoyle (1997) summarized three theoretical frameworks of job satisfaction. These authors found that individual job
satisfaction studies have taken on three forms. First, job satisfaction has been studied as the criterion variable of interest. Secondly, job satisfaction has been studied as one of a collection of criterion variables. Lastly, job satisfaction has been studied as a predictor variable in relation to another criterion of interest. The authors contended that while these three types of studies have been informative, they suggest the findings have been vague and often contradictory. They also suggest that few efforts have been made to synthesize the findings of individual studies of job satisfaction in educational administration.

Thompson et al. (1997) go on to further describe these forms in more detail. The first type includes content theories which attempt to explain job satisfaction in terms of needs that must be satisfied or values that must be attained. Contributors to this framework include Maslow (1954) and his Need Hierarchy Theory, and the work done by Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959). Herzberg’s two-factory theory suggests that workers are more likely to be motivated by motivators than by hygiene factors. Motivators include achievement, recognition, responsibility and advancement. According to Herzberg, hygiene factors like company policy and administration, working conditions, and salary contribute very little to job satisfaction.

A second framework of job satisfaction described by Thompson et al. (1997) was called process or discrepancy theories of job satisfaction. Process theories attempt to explain job satisfaction in terms of how categories of variables relate to or combine to cause job satisfaction (Locke, 1976). The process or discrepancy theories explain job satisfaction as the difference between an individual’s desired work outcomes and what an individual actually receives in the organization. Hoy and Miskel (1996) take it a step
further and suggest that this type of theory describes or contrasts an individual’s work motivation and organizational incentives.

The third framework describes models of job satisfaction and how they attempt to explain how categories of variables combine to relate to job satisfaction. These are also referred to situational models of job satisfaction. Essentially, situational models suggest that an individual’s job satisfaction is related to the combination of the variables or characteristics found in an individual’s work context (Thompson et al., 1997). After conducting a meta-analysis of several studies on job satisfaction, the findings of these authors provide initial support to the situational model of job satisfaction. This type of framework is what was used for the theoretical basis of this study. A portrayal of these combined situational models of job satisfaction is illustrated in Figure 1.


![Conceptual framework](Figure 1. Conceptual framework.)
What is depicted as the conceptual framework in Figure 1 is a combination of two situational theories of job satisfaction. One of the theories is by Glisson and Durick (1988) based on their research of job satisfaction in human service organizations. The other theory is from the work of Quarstein et al. (1992), who tested their hypotheses on students who were working in a variety of settings while attending college.

In this regard, Glisson and Durick (1988) noted that the broader organizational or situational context of work is a major source of variation in the attitudes of workers in human service organizations. They theorize that characteristics of job tasks can predict job satisfaction. Characteristics of the worker can predict worker commitment. Characteristics of the organizations can predict worker commitment and to some degree overall job satisfaction. Questions then remain as to whether job satisfaction factors are universal, and are they different for different roles or jobs. To take this type of framework and apply it to the high school principalship may help to explain why and how principals who attain longevity in the position find satisfaction in their work.

Quarstein et al. (1992) stated that job satisfaction theories touted by Maslow, Herzberg, and others fail to answer critical questions. Why employees holding seemingly excellent jobs in terms of pay report low job satisfaction, and why employees holding similar jobs have different job satisfaction levels is unknown. Additionally, why do job satisfaction levels change over time? To that end, Quarstein et al. developed the Situational Occurrences Theory which holds that job satisfaction is determined by two factors which include situational characteristics and situational occurrences.

Situational characteristics are the relatively stable or permanent aspects of a work environment that are tied to specific management policies and are slow to change.
Examples include working conditions, pay, autonomy, and promotional opportunities.

Situational occurrences are transitory. Examples would be the lack of ink for a printer in a classroom or a confusing memo from a supervisor. In and of themselves these events are not life-changing. Over time if these minor irritants or negative situational occurrences build up, they may affect the job satisfaction of an employee.

If Glisson and Durick’s assertion that job satisfaction is a multi-faceted concept that ties in with organizational commitment combined with Quarstein et al.’s Situational Occurrences Theory is used then what do the experiences of high school principals with longevity tell us? This will be the lens through which the experiences of high school principals will be explored and detailed.

This qualitative exploration is a departure from the other studies done where variables of job satisfaction are studied quantitatively.

**Chapter I Summary**

There appears to be a great deal of evidence that suggests we do need to improve our educational system for all students. If our children are to achieve higher standards of performance, our schools and the educators within them must be ready for these challenges. It appears that at the center of the reform initiatives is the building principal. Many factors have contributed to the increased responsibilities placed upon this person, and as a result there appears to be a decline in the availability or willingness of educators to take on this leadership role. This study examines those high school principal leaders who do stay in the position, and will hopefully provide some insight as to how or why they attained longevity and experienced some degree of satisfaction in their job.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

As revealed in Chapter I, significant changes have occurred in public schools including many aspects of school leadership. Considerable focus has been on how these changes influence teachers, parents, and students, but attention has not been given to the impact of these changes on principals who continue to stay in the position. This literature review considers principal shortages, burnout, and the role of the principal and his or her effect on student achievement. Retention of principals, job satisfaction, and principal longevity are also examined. Ultimately, this will lead to the area of study which is high school principal job satisfaction and longevity.

Importance of the High School Principal

Achieving and sustaining a high quality organization within a complex environment demands that leaders possess a wide range of leadership capabilities (Daresh, Gantner, Dunlap, & Hvizdak, 2000). Principals must respond to multiple demands from a variety of constituents while leading schools through a turbulent time in American education. Being an effective building manager was once sufficient to be considered an effective principal. Previously, principals served as building managers and student disciplinarians. Today, principals are expected to do that and much more (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

The common perception of the building principal before the era of reform is that most good administrators were managers (Kafka, 2009). School boards were happy with
administrators who could build good schedules, discipline students, manage budgets, and deal with large groups of people. Today, the increasing focus on the individual learner has put the building principal at the forefront of learning and activity in the school building, as they must work in concert with teachers and other staff members to improve learning.

As a result of the changing expectations, principals have had to adjust how they lead. Transformational leadership has become the norm, and school restructuring calls for greater emphasis on problem solving and student achievement which requires transformational leaders (Hallinger, 1992). Instructional leadership emerged as a term that describes a broad set of principal roles and responsibilities designed to address the professional needs of teachers and to foster improved achievement among students (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Marks and Printy (2003) found that strong school performance depends on integrated leadership mobilizing the collective action of individuals to produce high-quality teaching and learning. This leadership begins with a principal who fosters leadership amongst teachers.

Waters et al. (2003) conducted research on the effect of leadership practices on student achievement. They found that the behaviors and focus of principals can have an effect on student achievement. Principals have the potential to not only have a positive impact on student achievement, they can also have a marginal or negative impact on student achievement. The two primary variables that determine the direction and impact on student achievement include the focus of change, and whether leaders understand the magnitude or “order” of change they are leading. The talent and skill set of the principal
are factors that affect student achievement, and principals must adjust their leadership practices accordingly.

Crum and Sherman (2008) conducted an exploratory study designed to provide insight into how successful high school principals facilitate high levels of student achievement. One of their findings attributed high student achievement to principals who developed personnel and facilitated leadership among the teachers. The researchers found that responsible delegation and team empowerment among the teachers and staff was also closely associated. An effective principal has an understanding of adult learning theory and utilizes this knowledge to empower teachers to become leaders in the building. Effective communication and the ability to facilitate change were additional items that contributed to highly effective schools.

A recurring theme in applicable research is that when high school principals use their influence to develop more leaders among teaching staff, an increase in student achievement results. Leithwood and Mascall (2008) found that higher-achieving schools awarded leadership influence to all school members and other stakeholders to a greater degree than lower-achieving schools. This influence and leadership needs to be awarded and nurtured by the building principal. Clearly, the role of the principal can effect student achievement.

Another aspect of study has been the influence of the principal’s values on student achievement. Parkes and Thomas (2007) studied the issue of whether there are values held in common by effective secondary school principals that underpin their work practices. After studying principals from 40 city and rural secondary schools in one geographical area in Australia, they compared these observations with espoused values
on the Senge and Rokeach Scales. Finally, they interviewed the same principals in an effort to triangulate the data. They found that principals who were helpful, open, and honest were characterized as highly effective. Their operational style included being competent and knowledgeable with an emphasis on personal development for all. Finally, an unexpected outcome of the study was the principals’ “interruptibility” (p. 225). Contrary to time management experts, principals of effective schools were willing to be interrupted because of the value they placed on quality interpersonal relationships. Sergiovanni (1992) stated that truly effective schools are those with a shared vision clearly articulating the school’s core values. This surely starts with an effective building principal.

**Principal Is Pivotal in Restructuring High School**

The job of the building principal has continued to evolve in this age of accountability. In an early report, Portin et al. (1998) pointed out that the demands upon principals have changed as federal program priorities have shifted and the adoption of state standards has steadily increased. These facts combined with the school effectiveness research and the changes in ethnic and socioeconomic composition of the students in schools has contributed to principals reporting a great deal of managerial duties that must be done along with being an instructional leader.

Many high school principals are being asked to transform schools while dealing with clamors for accountability from several divergent entities. Parents, school districts, and state mandates have presented differing demands and expectations for educators. To successfully implement a comprehensive school reform, principals must take the existing structure and culture of the school as a starting point and then use the external
accountability pressures in their favor to push the school in the direction of their ultimate vision (White-Smith & White, 2009).

Elmore (2003) states that this kind of leadership requires principals who think beyond the assumption that their job is to make the existing school more effective. He believes principals need to reconceptualize it and change it in significant ways. He suggested that one of the few uncontested findings in educational research is that the principal makes the difference between a mediocre school and a good school.

Fink and Brayman (2006) found that the rapid turnover of school leaders and principals creates significant barriers to educational change. If principals are viewed by teachers, parents, and students as interchangeable, then the kind of leadership required for long-term, sustained enhancement of learning for all students will remain elusive. If schools are to continue to adapt and change to meet current demands of today’s society, then one of the key players in this process must be the principal who stays in the position for multiple years.

**Increase in High School Principal Responsibilities**

It is clear in the literature that the job of the high school principal has changed. With the change in the position come other consequences. Hallinger (1992) identified this several years ago when the change in principal responsibilities began. Hallinger described the fact that the principal was once a program manager. This changed in the 1980s when the pressure for principals to exercise their instructional leadership role increased. The issue then and continues to be the fact that “these aspiring instructional leaders operate in a context that has made few policy adjustments designed to reshape others’ expectations of the principal” (p. 43).
The results of another study reinforce this fact after analyzing role descriptors identified by expert principals. In a national study, a panel of 38 high school principals who were chosen as state high school principals of the year in the 2000–2001 Principal of the Year recognition program which is sponsored annually by MetLife and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). These principals on this expert panel participated in a series of electronic conversations and rating activities and identified 45 role descriptors. Both the descriptors and the conclusion mirrors other studies which state the principalship has increased in complexity, and there is substantial conflict in the principals’ perceptions of the requirements for their position (Goodwin et al., 2003).

Grubb and Flessa (2006) examined multiple different leadership structures in high schools because the principal job may have become too big for one person. In the 10 different primary and secondary schools studied, these alternative approaches included schools with two coprincipals, a rotating principalship, and a small school with no principal where teachers have divided the tasks among themselves. They found that the alternatives developed begin to show that different arrangements are possible and have a range of potential benefits. Benefits include closer attention to instructional practices, which principals have often complained that they do not have sufficient time to complete.

Co-principals leading a building is a recent idea and has initially been studied by Eckman and Kelber (2009). They conducted a secondary analysis of data previously reported in two survey studies on the principalship. These two studies included surveys on role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction. The goal was to compare traditional principals and co-principals with regard to their experiences of role conflict,
role commitment, and job satisfaction. The sample of 87 co-principals and 86 traditional principals revealed that with the co-principal leadership model, it is an effective way to reduce the level of role conflict and thus increase job satisfaction of principals. They go on to say that co-principals can balance both work and personal roles in a more equitable manner. Finally, Eckman and Kelber found that co-principals experienced a greater degree of job satisfaction than did traditional principals. This would suggest that if the level of job satisfaction contributes to retention, one could expect a more stable leadership model with the co-principalship.

The principal’s role in a school is diverse and often comes with conflicting demands. Goodwin et al. (2003) reported four major themes that emerged after they conducted the study of the 38 secondary principals who were recipients of Principal of the Year in their respective states. These include role conflict, accountability conflict, autonomy conflict, and responsibility conflict. Principals in this study confirm that they understand the need to be an instructional leader first and foremost. However, a role conflict occurs when principals are overwhelmed with managerial tasks that detract from being an instructional leader. The manager’s role honors stability, manageability, and finite accomplishments, while the instructional leader’s role embraces action, shared decision making, and a focus on the future (Daresh et al., 2000).

The conflict in accountability comes from the stress felt by educators to emphasize standards and assessment contrasted with the increased demands to meet serious student needs including poverty, illiteracy, crime, addiction, and poor health (Murphy, 1998). The building principal must assist and lead change and provide hope while addressing all of these needs. Management tasks are more explicit and procedural
compliance is a high priority for district-level administrators. Serious social needs of students are more difficult to quantify and address, yet they can derail achievement for both individuals and entire schools. This creates a situation where the building principal feels accountable to multiple people who may have disparate needs and goals for the school and the students.

Boyer (1983) states, “In the early days, the principal possessed almost total autonomy” (p. 224). As early as 1983, Boyer argued that principal autonomy must be enhanced in order to provide the flexibility to meet the needs of the school. Today many opposing pressures have reduced autonomy. Goodwin et al. (2003) found that principals identified a conflict between being autonomous and being responsive to mandates. This conflict results from a loss of autonomy brought about by legislative and bureaucratic mandates which contrast with the sense of responsibility of building relationships to generate and nurture student growth and development.

A fourth theme in this study (Goodwin et al., 2003) identified the increasing complexity of the principalship and the need for both professional and clerical assistance. Federal and state legislation, mandates, funding issues, and equity issues have had an immense impact on the daily operation of schools. The responsibility conflict is further confirmed by DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003), who completed a study of principals in the state of Virginia. Of the questionnaires mailed to 4,237 principals and assistant principals from all levels, they found that the most pervasive problems and issues principals faced centered around the expanding expectations of their instructional leadership role.
In terms of principal compensation for increased responsibilities, Poppin and Shen (2003) found in their analysis of secondary principals’ salaries, that over a span of time from 1987 to 2000, principal salaries increased 6.4% when accounting for inflation. They completed this analysis of secondary principals’ salaries using data from Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). Secondly, when comparing the trend of principals’ salaries to other workers, their salaries increased less over the 12-year period. It appears then, that although more is demanded from building principals in recent years, the salaries as compared to teachers and workers in other fields have not increased at a comparable rate. This may be a reason for a subsequent decrease in the number of educators aspiring to be a principal.

**Decrease in Candidate Pool**

The demands of students, parents, and teachers can keep principals engaged in leadership work from morning to night. Cushing, Kerrins, and Johnstone (2003) using data released by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing found that low pay, job stress, and long hours contribute to qualified individuals failing to apply for principal positions. In the state of California, from 1998–2000 over 2,500 new administrative credentials were issued, which totaled about 72% of the principal positions in the state. These data appear to show that teachers were attaining advanced degrees in educational leadership but were not willing to pursue a principalship for a variety of reasons.

Papa and Baxter (2005) analyzed a panel data set of New York State public school employees where they found there was a perceived shortage of principals, but in reality there is a large number of principals who would retire within the next 5 to 10 years. They also found that urban principals are not paid more than their suburban and
rural counterparts. Thus, there is no salary premium or financial incentive to work in what some describe as more difficult working conditions.

Papa and Baxter (2005) also discovered that today’s prospective principals have, on average, less experience in lower-level administration, as compared to current principals. This suggests that there may be a problem with the current incentive structure for principals and for teachers. Additionally, Papa and Baxter found that on average, the salaries of experienced principals adjusted for months worked within a year, are less than the salaries of the experienced teachers in their district.

The beginning of this century has been characterized by a high number of anticipated retirements and shortages in the principals ranks (Petzko, 2008). In the first part of the century, the shortage of qualified candidates for high school and middle school vacancies was predicted to be as high as 55% and 47% for elementary vacancies (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). These researchers also found that of those who accept principal positions, there appears to be a 45 to 55% attrition rate during an eight-year period of time, with the largest attrition rate occurring during the first three years on the job. Grogan and Andrews used data that were reported based on a nationwide study of the school principalship (Jones, 2001).

Howley et al. (2005) surveyed teachers’ perceptions in Ohio and found that teachers who have fewer years of experience, value career advancement, and have taken the initiative to pursue administrative licensure seem to be the most likely pool of candidates for principal positions. Their study of 868 teachers, of which half held an administrative license and half did not, confirmed generalizations from previous studies concerning teachers’ views of the principalship. In this regard, Pounder and Merrill
(2001) using survey research methods of 170 teachers from one Western state, found that teachers contemplate a career in administration based upon its perceived level of attraction. Essentially, teachers carefully weigh both the benefits and limitations of the principalship before making a choice to make a career move.

Several studies conclude that teachers do not pursue the principalship because of perceived difficulties and frustrations associated with the job (Jordan, McCauley, & Comeaux, 1994; Malone, Sharp, & Walter, 2001). The associated disincentives include the growing complexity of the position, the stress level, the lack of support and resources a principal receives, long hours, low salary, and a negative impact on family life. These and other stresses of the principal’s job appear to be the reasons for large numbers of teachers holding administrative certification who have elected not to pursue a principalship.

Winter and Morgenthal (2002) used recruitment simulation of secondary assistant principals in Kentucky, with the participants role-playing as job applicants and reacting to high school principal jobs described in formal job descriptions. The study was a factorial experiment involving a fixed-factor between-within ANOVA. At the time of the study, Kentucky had been undergoing significant educational reform initiatives. Their investigation provided empirical information that when examining principal openings, assistant principals are most likely to consider school achievement as a determining factor. The impact of school achievement is the potentially decisive factor in decisions to interview for and accept a job as a principal.

Winter and Morgenthal (2002) found that principal applicants want high-achieving schools, but the experimental nature of the study did not permit the researchers
to identify the reason for this phenomenon. Despite shortages of applicants for principal vacancies, highly experienced assistant principals are not attracted to jobs at the schools that may need new leadership the most.

In another study, Bass (2006) surveyed students participating in graduate level educational administration courses. Eight hundred sixty surveys were used from students in principal preparation courses from universities across the nation. Bass found that increased stress, increased time commitment, pressure from standardized test scores, and excessive paperwork were all factors influencing educators’ decisions to enter the principalship.

With regard to hiring principals, superintendent perceptions of principal applicant pools has been examined. Most recently, superintendents reveal that they expect to have 41% fewer applicants today than they did 15 year ago (Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009). According to the 197 superintendents in the state of Arkansas that were surveyed, less than half of the applicants who made up the leadership search pool were qualified for the job. This was especially true in rural areas where candidate pools were smaller. Additionally, candidates who did not secure a principalship shortly after earning certification often drop out of the principal search process. Cusick (2003) reported that after conducting interviews of superintendents and human resource directors in Michigan, there is a shortage in candidates for principal positions.

Quinn (2002) completed a report for the National Association of Secondary School Principals and found that half of the districts surveyed in 2000 reported there was a shortage of qualified candidates. Whitaker (2001) reported findings of a study of 176 superintendents who were surveyed on their perceptions of the quantity and quality of
candidates for the principalship. Of the total, 108 surveys were returned. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 superintendents of districts of various sizes. Whitaker found that 90% of superintendents in a survey indicated a moderate to extreme shortage of principal candidates, with the problem more severe at the high school level. Fink and Brayman (2006) sum it up this way: “The result is that school improvement becomes like a set of bobbing corks, with many schools rising under one set of leaders, only to sink under the next” (p. 63).

The cumulative result is that a school’s efforts to sustain “deep learning” experiences for all its students are severely limited (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Nationwide, school district administrators are examining ways to increase the number of high quality principal candidates and some districts have started programs to grow their own administrators (Whitaker, 2006). Hix, Wall, and Frieler (2003) discussed ways that principals can mentor and prepare teachers to become administrators. This approach of empowering teachers may have positive effects on the school culture as well, in addition to developing the strengths of staff members. These concepts tend to support the idea that the principal job is demanding and school leadership is a massive undertaking.

**Principal Burnout**

Burnout is a subject that has been studied in a variety of settings, both inside and outside the educational field. Burnout was initially a vague concept with no standard definition, although there were a wide variety of opinions about what it was and what could be done about it (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Burnout has been defined as high emotional exhaustion, feelings of depersonalization, and low feelings of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).
The relationship of stress to burnout within the education profession was studied by Friesen and Sarros (1989). These researchers surveyed 128 administrators and 635 teachers from a large Western Canadian urban public school district using a 72-item questionnaire. Using regression analysis, the findings of this study revealed that overall work stress was the major predictor of emotional exhaustion for both teachers and administrators. Maslach (1982) also pointed out that burnout may develop if work is unchallenging and unrewarding and lacking in positive feedback and recognition.

As we have gained additional understanding, burnout has been rephrased as an erosion of engagement with the job. What started out as important, meaningful, and challenging work becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling, and meaningless (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout is now viewed as a multidimensional concept. Gmelch and Gates (1998) randomly selected 250 elementary principals, 250 junior high/middle school principals, 250 high school principals, and 250 superintendents to survey in Washington state. Each administrator was mailed an Administrator Work Inventory (AWI) and 656 were used to examine responses.

The AWI consisted of six instruments which included an Administrator Stress Index, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, an Administrative Role Questionnaire, the Type A Personality component, the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, and general information. Gmelch and Gates (1998) found a strong negative correlation between job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion. Smaller correlations were found between depersonalization and personal accomplishment, which are additional dimensions of burnout. Each of these correlations between the three dimensions of burnout and job satisfaction may suggest that those with higher levels of job satisfaction experience less burnout.
Principal burnout has been researched in a variety of studies. Using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, in a study of over 100 principals in K-12 settings, Whitaker (1992) found that more than 19% scored high in emotional exhaustion and another 20% in the moderate range. High school principals had higher scores in emotional exhaustion than did elementary or middle level principals. This is not surprising due to additional demands made on high school principals. Another finding however, was that 77% of principals reported high levels of personal accomplishment. It appears that despite principals’ reporting of worthwhile accomplishments in their job, there remains a risk of losing principals and having to contend with small applicant pools for principal vacancies at the high school level.

Friedman (1995) stated that burnout has been measured extensively for rank and file professionals in a variety of fields, including teaching. He stated, however, that there have been a small number of studies on burnout among managers, including school principals. In measuring school principal-experienced burnout, Friedman used a survey to measure burnout among 821 Israeli principals. What he found was that principals and teachers experience burnout in different ways. Negative feelings, such as depersonalization, have often been found among teachers. Among school principals, negative feelings were found to be expressed by a strong sense of discontentment and deprecation. Additionally, teachers expressed burnout in terms of indifference toward service recipients (students), while principals expressed burnout with a desire for distance or aloofness from service recipients.

Howard and Mallory (2008) conducted a study of high school principals in Georgia to measure feelings of isolation, the impact of isolation on their lives, and the
strategies employed to cope with isolation and loneliness. The study’s design was to examine 10 high school principals’ perceptions of professional isolation using a phenomenological interviewing strategy. They found that the time demands of the position, the accountability pressures, and the level of perceived support of lack of support from central office personnel as factors contributing to the “it is lonely at the top” feelings. It may be no surprise then that the principal position has a degree of burnout associated with it.

**Longevity**

There has been limited research done in the area of principal longevity. Earley and Weindling (2007) examined what needed to be done to ensure a longer “shelf life” for school leaders in Great Britain. They drew upon the longitudinal study of secondary headteachers at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The study began in the early 1980s at the NFER and used a combination of national surveys and detailed case studies of 16 secondary schools. The researchers returned to find out more about these same headteachers five years later in 1989 and again in 1994.

One question they posed was do school leaders have a certain amount of time to serve, or is the fact that the constantly changing educational environment in which they now work means that few get a chance to “plateau out”? Their study found a trend that while some school leaders do remain in the position for an average of 10 years, the view of the principal or headmaster must change. The job is not as attractive as it once was and it is not fair to expect people to do such a high powered and demanding job for a number of years and carry it out well.
In interviewing committed administrators, Boris-Schacter and Merrifield (2000) intended to find out why these particular principals seem less weary and embattled than those depicted in prior studies. Their sample included 19 principals who guided graduate students through administrative internships. They drew upon a sample of principals who had been identified by their counterparts as being “particularly good.” This meant they were successful in incorporating new initiatives of reform and whose leadership could serve as a model for aspiring principals.

What Boris-Schacter and Merrifield (2000) found was that these principals saw themselves as lifelong learners. The authors then ascertained that the insights of these principals might provide a window into what constitutes meaningful professional development activities for more typical administrators. Boris-Schacter and Merrifield found these principals espoused a positive professional and personal identity, and were passionate about their interests and their outside lives. Their ability to integrate all aspects of their lives into the principalship led to a more seamless, less stressful transition from the personal to the professional. The results were summed up best by the following statement. “While others may be fleeing without capable replacements, these leaders do not quit. They pursue systemic change while modeling personal intellectualism” (p. 96).

In a study of women leaders at the post-secondary level, Christman and McClellan (2007) explored how seven diverse women administrators sustained their administrative roles. Using the Delphi technique, they found that women administrators in higher education developed resiliency within their academic leadership. Their subconscious or conscious play with gender norms had helped them navigate barriers that others built around them. While this study does not give any explanation for longevity
amongst some leaders in higher education, it does suggest that resiliency may be a trait that is advantageous in order to maintain a leadership position.

In another study, surveys were distributed to a population of 195 government schools in Tasmania and there was a 67% return rate among principals. The survey was designed to gather data including demographics, leadership characteristics, values and beliefs, tensions and dilemmas, school capacity building, decision making, evaluation and accountability, and perceptions of school success. Specifically, principals who were considered late-career principals in Tasmania were examined. Mulford et al. (2007) found that these principals are more likely to have a strong work ethic, to consult widely and have a strong social conscience. These findings may appear to contradict those studies where burnout among principals was examined which found some principals to experience isolation and exhaustion more so later in their career (Howard & Mallory, 2008; Whitaker, 1992).

A study done in Ontario highlights the need for leadership succession and the effects that succession planning can have on student achievement. In Ontario there is a propensity for school leaders to move to different schools within five years of becoming a principal. Hargreaves, Moore, Fink, Brayman, and White (2003) studied four high schools in Ontario and found that sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others and spreads improvement across districts. In the ideal succession scenario, a school leader helped achieve impressive improvement and secured planned continuity by appointing insiders.

Hargreaves et al. (2003) also found that the nature and effectiveness of principal succession are affected by the career stages of the leaders who follow one another.
Novice principals did best when they were developed within and drawn internally from school that had become strong professional learning communities. They were more likely to fail or falter when “they were parachuted in with little warning, paled in comparison to their more charismatic predecessors, and were confronted by disillusioned or cynical staffs who had been propelled into change only to be abandoned by their previous leaders in mid-flight” (p. 77).

Lastly, Hargreaves et al. (2003) stated, where principals are achieving results, their tenure needs to be long enough—at least five years—to embed their improvements and themselves firmly in the culture of their schools. Principals who have initiated significant improvements in a school, need sufficient tenure to see their efforts through.

**Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction has been the subject of continual study since Locke’s seminal work in the 1970s. Studies have looked at the relation between employee attitudes and performance, and in relation to core self-evaluations and work success (Judge, 2009; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Ostroff, 1992; Saari & Judge, 2004). Multiple settings, including education and schools, have been represented in published research.

Though many constructs contribute to measures of job satisfaction, knowledge gaps still exist in this area (Saari & Judge, 2004). The authors contend there is confusion and debate among practitioners on the topic of employee attitudes and job satisfaction. They attempted to characterize the existing research and give recommendations related to knowledge gaps. When examining job satisfaction, Saari and Judge contend that employees have attitudes and viewpoints concerning their job, which ultimately will affect the level of satisfaction experienced. Saari and Judge concluded that the cause of
employee attitudes, the results of positive or negative job satisfaction, and the difficulty of measuring employee attitudes are all factors that may affect job satisfaction. Essentially, job satisfaction is a concept with many aspects, and one must understand its complexity when looking at job satisfaction data.

The study of job satisfaction is difficult and has changed since the 1990s (Koll, Robertson, Lampe, & Hegedus, 1996). In their study, Koll et al. had a sample of 62 principals and 107 teachers in the region of where the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh is located. The researchers surveyed these educators using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a modified version of the Bass Administrative Behaviors instrument, and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire as the survey tools. Koll et al. found data that indicated that personality was not a significant predictor of leadership style or job satisfaction. They also found that work satisfaction for principals was not predicted by any of the measured variables. Since this research was done, there have been other conclusions drawn from studies involving personality types and job satisfaction.

Judge, Heller, and Klinger (2008) studied the relationship between personality type and job satisfaction of university employees using quantitative methods. Approximately 500 university employees were randomly selected to participate from the email directories of three state universities in the Midwestern United States and 193 indicated their willingness to participate. Personality and job satisfaction surveys were mailed to these individuals and there was an 82% return rate on these surveys.

They reported a link between personality type and job satisfaction. Three personality taxonomies used in their research were found to be significantly related to job satisfaction. The three taxonomies were positive and negative affectivity, the five-factor
model, and core self-evaluations. Each of the personality taxonomies, as well as level of job satisfaction, was measured using instruments developed by other researchers. They found that the two most consistent correlates of job satisfaction were self-esteem and emotional stability.

Judge, Heller, and Klinger’s (2008) study was the first to find that the core self-evaluations typology predicts job satisfaction beyond the other two instruments. In particular, emotional stability was most strongly correlated with job satisfaction. Judge (2009) stated that core self-evaluations (CSE) are an important emergent concept. Judge holds that CSE may more consistently predict outcomes because core self-evaluations are fundamental bottom-line evaluations that people make of themselves. CSE are broader than self-esteem because it also reflects beliefs in one’s capabilities, one’s competence, and a general sense that life will turn out well for oneself. The new concept of core self-evaluations should be the subject of additional job satisfaction study.

Teacher job satisfaction has also been studied extensively. Additionally, well-documented teacher shortages exist in certain subjects, grade levels and areas of the country (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These teacher shortages have been a catalyst for study of teacher job satisfaction. In particular, the proportion of minority teachers has been decreasing, despite the increasing numbers of minority students (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010). For example, 451 tenth grade students from a nationally representative sample, who aspired to be teachers, were studied over a 10-year period by Mau, Ellsworth, and Hawley (2008). Data were collected on these students and included demographic variables, school and cognitive variables, parental and family variables, self-efficacy variables, and motivational factors. Researchers
followed-up with the students every two years after the study was initiated in 1988. Once in the workforce, job satisfaction was measured by a survey. They found that students who continued towards career teaching goals were more likely to be satisfied with their work than students who dropped out of the teaching pipeline. In fact, 92% of the teachers in this group were generally satisfied with their job.

Brunetti (2001) pointed out that teacher job satisfaction has been studied quantitatively, but little research has been focused on attitudes of satisfied teachers. Brunetti used an Experienced Teacher Survey he developed and sent the survey to 426 teachers working in a Northern California school district’s high schools. Sixty percent of the teachers returned the survey and of the 106 of those that returned the survey, 28 were selected for in-depth interviews. Those that agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their job were interviewed. The teachers who reported being satisfied pointed towards working with young people and seeing them learn and grow as a source of their satisfaction. Other motivators included teaching their subject, serving society, and having autonomy in the classroom. The reasons why teachers stay in the classroom were examined in this study, as opposed to reasons why teachers leave the classroom.

Thompson et al. (1997) synthesized quantitative findings on job satisfaction contained within the first 26 volumes of *Educational Administration Quarterly*. Their inquiry found that the strongest predictors of a lack of overall job satisfaction in educational settings are role tensions which include role conflict and role ambiguity. When role tensions are high, job satisfaction is low. In addition, they found that demographic characteristics provided little explanatory value in predicting job satisfaction.
Glisson and Durick’s (1988) study proposed that the variables that contribute to job satisfaction are different than the variables to contribute to an individual’s commitment to the organization. Their quantitative study on 319 workers in 22 different human services fields indicate that characteristics of the job tasks are the best predictors of satisfaction while the characteristics of the organization are the best predictors of commitment to the organization. The participants in the study included workers from the social service, mental health, corrections, recreational services, gerontological, crisis intervention, and services to victims of crimes field. Glisson and Durick stated that a worker’s beliefs and experiences are filtered through the same subjective lens therefore satisfaction and commitment are tied together. They also found that job satisfaction depends largely on the opportunity for the human service worker to use a variety of skills in performing job tasks and on the clarity of the requirements and responsibilities of the job.

A study of secondary administrators provided insight into the predictors of job growth and job satisfaction for both principals and assistant principals. Conley, Shaw, and Glasman (2007) conducted a correlational study using survey data to describe job characteristics, organizational characteristics, and personal characteristics and their relationships with job satisfaction. Using the California public school directory, randomly selected participants were sent surveys and the 61% return rate included 66 principals and 87 assistant principals. Attachment to coworkers was an important variable to the job satisfaction of both groups. Their findings provided evidence that interpersonal relationships with other school personnel was important in contributing to job satisfaction. These authors also concluded that the job satisfaction of school leaders is
developed and maintained within the context of the satisfaction of coworkers. The organizational climate that is developed in a school building may have an impact on job satisfaction for all employees.

Derlin and Schneider (1994) studied job satisfaction for urban and suburban principals and teachers and found differences in the results for the various groups. This study examined data collected by the Study Commission on the Quality of Education in Milwaukee Metropolitan Public Schools. Of the 10,100 teachers surveyed, 54.6% responded and of the 442 principals surveyed, 75.4% returned completed questionnaires.

Job satisfaction was found to not be a universal concept. The role an educator fulfills influences different aspects of job satisfaction. Extrinsic issues, which include pay, advancement, and security, influenced teachers less than administrators. Teacher job satisfaction also appeared to be more heavily influenced by student achievement success, recognition by superiors, and involvement in decision-making, than was principal job satisfaction.

A major implication from Derlin and Schneider (1994) is that because teachers and principals perceive job satisfaction differently, administrators who structure work environments to meet their job satisfaction will fail to meet the needs of their teachers. Job satisfaction is determined differently based on role and context.

Eckman (2004) researched role conflict and job satisfaction in search of an explanation for the low numbers of women in educational leadership positions. Female and male high school principals in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin were surveyed. The instruments used included a Role Conflict Questionnaire, a Role Commitment
Question, and a Job Satisfaction Survey. Eckman also worked to get equal numbers of male and female principals to participate in the study.

Eckman (2004) found both similarities and differences between male and female principals in their personal and professional attributes as well as how they experience role conflict and job satisfaction. Women tend to be older and have more years of teaching experience when they attain their first principal position. Female principals experience higher levels of role conflict over trying to manage their families and their career. A similarity between females and males existed, when studying job satisfaction, as the two groups as a whole experience only moderate levels of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was significantly and inversely related to role conflict for the entire group, and role conflict was inversely related to age.

A study in Illinois released results of job satisfaction with all principals but did not delineate between elementary and secondary principals. All principals in the state of Illinois were asked to participate in the survey and findings are representative of approximately 21% of the state’s public schools. A strong correlation was found between job satisfaction and principals’ perceptions of their ability to influence school change. Another finding was that principals preferred to work in schools with the most advantaged student populations. Finally, another relevant finding is that there is some tension between how principals use their time and their perceptions of the value of their efforts, and this tension may be the crux of the problem in today’s principalship (White, Brown, Hunt, & Klostermann, 2011).

The findings from White et al. (2011) are similar to that of Eckman (2004) in that the presence of the conflict between what principals want to do in their position and what
they are required to do creates a tension and thus potentially leads to the dissatisfaction that some principals feel in their jobs.

In the state of Iowa, Sodoma and Else (2009) conducted a study to examine the job satisfaction of Iowa public school principals and compare the results to the perceptions from a study that had been completed six years earlier. Again, a questionnaire was used to survey K-12 principals and results were not separated out for high school principals. Sodoma and Else found that in general, Iowa principals were more satisfied in 2005 than they were in 1999. While this might be an important finding, more study needs to be done with specific principal groups, in this case secondary principals, and more current findings would be beneficial.

**Satisfied Workers Perform at Higher Levels**

There is considerable interest in the nature of the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance (Judge et al., 2001). Since job satisfaction appears to have a link to performance, the effectiveness of organizations could possibly be determined by the issue. Meta-analyses have been completed on a variety of research studies. Different researchers have found the link between the two to be of varying intensity (Harrison, Newman, & Roth, 2006). Iaffaldano and Muchinsky (1985) found that job satisfaction is only weakly related to job performance, however. Fisher (2003) acknowledged that it may be counterintuitive that happy workers are not necessarily productive workers and this has prompted researchers to more fully investigate the topic.

Judge et al. (2001) concluded after a comprehensive review on the job satisfaction–job performance relationship that these two variables were at least moderately correlated. Judge et al. point out that there are up to seven different models in
which the satisfaction–performance relationship has been specified which may lead to the wide variety of results found in studies and the literature. Judge et al. contend that the job satisfaction–job performance correlations be studied in the context of other correlates of job satisfaction.

Ng, Sorensen, and Yim (2009) took this a step further and found that while there might be a correlation between job satisfaction and job performance in the United States, the same may not hold true in other cultures. These researchers completed a meta-analysis which allowed for the accumulation and examination of studies conducted in different countries. By studying 208 independent samples for meta-analyzing the job satisfaction–performance relationship, 62 of which were conducted outside the United States, the researchers found a moderating effect of culture for task performance. Essentially, culture matters in the job satisfaction–performance relationship, but more detailed research is required to conceptualize how the specific elements contained in each dimension of culture may affect the relationship.

Ng et al. (2009) purport that employees in other cultures show differing relationships between job satisfaction and job performance. The job satisfaction–job performance relationship was likely to be stronger in individualistic cultures versus collectivistic cultures. In an individualistic culture such as the United States, employees act according to their own self-interest and preferences. If an employee feels favorably about the job, he or she may choose to devote additional time and energy and may exert the effort to make sure the job is well-done. In a collectivistic culture, such as India, job satisfaction is a lesser determinant of job behavior.
Watson, Wiese, Vaidya, and Tellegen (1999) offer some insights in terms of a theoretical framework regarding job satisfaction and job performance. They suggest that emotions are closely related to cognitive functioning. Positive emotions promote the behaviors of working toward goals and active interpersonal behaviors. Positive emotions enhance feelings of energy and vigor, motivating individuals to pursue goals for the organization. George and Brief (1996) contend that “happy employees,” or those satisfied with their jobs, are often more energized and have more energy to dedicate to work tasks.

Conversely, Watson et al. (1999) suggested that individuals’ negative emotions increase withdrawal type behaviors. In the organizational context, this suggests that “unhappy employees,” or those dissatisfied with their jobs, may exhibit counterproductive behavior or opt to exit the company. These theoretical reasons suggest that job satisfaction and job performance should be positively related.

Brief and Weiss (2002) conducted a review of literature on the study of affect in the workplace. These authors contend that individual satisfaction is an important variable to study along with cohesion, and commitment levels because the benefits of workers with a positive affect ultimately have an influence on the organizations. Brief and Weiss also posit that workplace production increases when individuals are satisfied and committed to their job.

A general, positive, job attitude leads individuals to contribute rather than withhold desirable inputs from their work roles (Harrison et al., 2006). These researchers, using a meta-analysis, found that overall job attitude provides a powerful predictor of focal performance, contextual performance and turnover in jobs. The links among attitude, job satisfaction, and job performance continue to be explored.
In addition to performance, job satisfaction is linked to important organizational outcomes such as employee turnover, contextual performance, and organizational performance (Organ & Ryan, 1995; Ostroff, 1992). A number of studies have demonstrated perceived organizational support to be an important predictor of job satisfaction (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational climate are concepts interwoven and related to each other. Each has been studied in a variety of settings.

**Chapter II Summary**

It has been substantiated in the literature that the job of the building principal is a critical job, and organizations that provide adequately for employees tend to have more satisfied employees. It is not sufficient to study the school organization and the specific job of the principal in isolation from each other. Whitaker (1992) stated it is necessary to grasp the nature of the individual that occupies the principal position. In other words, it is necessary to have congruence between the job of principal and the person occupying that role. Whitaker contended that greater congruence might result in less propensity to experience burnout and ultimately leave the position of principal.

Bass (2006) indicated in his work that inhibitor studies associated with the principalship considerably outnumber motivator studies. Consequently, research on current high school principals and why they stay in the position is necessary. Results from a study of this type can also encourage talented educators to pursue administration, as well as inform and prepare aspiring principals in university preparation programs.

The role of the principal needs to continue to be examined as schools cannot afford to lose quality educators already filling the positions, or discourage aspiring
administrators due to a myriad of inherent difficulties. It is important to study current high school principals to gain an understanding from those that have remained in the position regarding what leads to, or detracts from, their job satisfaction. This study should provide some insight into this area. Superintendents and school boards can use the information to determine what might be done to attract and retain quality people to the principal position.

Let us now turn to Chapter III, which covers the research methods for my proposed research study.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

I am interested in the experiences of high school principals who achieve longevity in the position, and examine what they find satisfying about the position. This interest comes from the readings and the research that indicates the high school principal position is a challenging job as well as my own personal and professional experiences. This chapter describes the research design and methodology used in my study. Participant selection is discussed as well as data collection methods and the use of the semi-structured interview. Finally, data analysis and the role and placement of the researcher are examined.

In order to probe deeply into the experiences of principals who fit this profile, my study was conducted in a qualitative tradition. Qualitative research is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). It is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people. Qualitative research takes place in the natural setting and is emergent rather than tightly prefigured (Creswell, 2003).

Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research tells a story (Patton, 2002). There has been limited research conducted that examines why educators have aspired to become high school principals. Even less is known about their ability to
stay in the position for multiple years despite the challenges faced by current building leaders in today’s educational climate.

Qualitative methods provide an opportunity to study an area in greater depth than in a quantitative study. Qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of the experiences of high school principals. Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). The phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally in that it has no predetermined course established by the researcher which would occur in a laboratory or other controlled setting.

**Research Design**

In the whole realm of qualitative study, there are many different methods of research that can be done. There is no wellspring of qualitative research (Stake, 1995). Stake further contends that qualitative researchers press for understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists. Creswell (2007) describes five approaches to qualitative inquiry. These are narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Creswell continues with, “At the most fundamental level, the five differ in what they are trying to accomplish—their foci or the primary objectives of the studies” (p. 77). Merriam (1998) follows that these five types of qualitative research are more prevalent in education than others. All of these share the essential characteristics of “the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of fieldwork, an inductive orientation to analysis, and findings that are richly descriptive” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11).
This study used a phenomenological approach to understand the experiences of high school principals. Polkinghorne (2005) writes that a primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness. The focus of a phenomenology is to understand the essence of the experience.

Moustaskas (1994) stated that the aim of a phenomenology is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. The focus of a phenomenology is on what the person experiences. The expression is in the form of language that is as loyal to the lived experience as possible (Polkinghorne, 1989). Thus, phenomenological inquiry attempts to describe and elucidate the meanings of human experience. More than other forms of inquiry, phenomenology attempts to get beneath how people describe their experience to the structures that underlie consciousness, that is, to the essential nature of ideas (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). By studying practicing high school principals in the phenomenological tradition, the participant’s descriptions and perceptions were obtained in a setting that is natural and the lived experiences were reported as they emerged.

**Participant Selection**

Sampling strategies for a phenomenological study can vary. Creswell (2007) contends that it is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied. In this case, the phenomenon of longevity among secondary school principals in Michigan high schools is the focus of the research. Merriam (2002) states the following:

To begin with, since you are not interested in “how much” or “how often,” random sampling makes little sense. Instead, since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the
participants, it is important to select a sample from which most can be learned.

(p. 12)

Merriam goes on to call this purposive or purposeful sampling.

Participants for this study included current principals of Michigan high schools who have students in grades 9-12. Purposeful sampling was used to identify high school principals in the western region of Michigan who have been in the high school principal position for a specified length of time. Patton (2002) notes that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in depth study. Criteria dictated that principals have served for at least five consecutive years as a head principal in a high school in Michigan. This type of sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

To access participants, I initially contacted 16 principals in the Ottawa-Kent (OK) athletic conference by email to see if they would like to participate in the study. The OK conference is comprised of approximately 50 Michigan high schools located in Kent, Ottawa, Muskegon, and Barry counties. I was a principal of a high school in the OK conference for seven years and I had a general idea of who had been in their positions for at least five years. An email was sent to these 16 principals informing them of my study and asking if they would like to learn more. A copy of this email is in Appendix A. The reason for starting with this identified group is that this was a convenient sample to which I would have access and would be able to interview. During this contact I provided a brief explanation of the study. If the principal was interested in participating, I faxed a consent form for him or her to sign.
Of the 16 principals originally contacted by email, 13 replied via email that they would be interested in participating. Consent forms were emailed to the 13 principals after they received an explanation of the study by phone or through email. A copy of the consent form is in Appendix B. Once the signed consent form was received by me, I then asked if they indeed had at least five years in their current position. Of the 13 interested in participating, it was revealed that two of them had only four and one-half years on the job, so therefore I did not continue on in the process of having them to participate. At this point, I had secured 11 participants.

There were three potential participants that did not respond to my initial email. I then contacted these principals a second time via email. Again, there was no response and I began to use snowball sampling to find another participant so at least 12 individuals would be a part of the study.

Snowball or chain sampling can also be used to identify principals to participate in the study. I solicited suggestions from a principal in Newaygo County for other potential participants who may be principals in schools outside of the Ottawa-Kent athletic conference. He was asked to recommend colleagues he knew that fit the criteria and may be willing to participate. This is how the 12th and final participant was identified. I contacted that principal by email, asked if he or she were interested in participating and after getting affirmation, faxed a consent form and set up a time to meet. Patton (2002) indicates that this is a valid approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases.

Polkinghorne (1989) recommends that for a phenomenological study, the researcher interview from five to 25 individuals who have all experienced the
phenomenon. The goal for this study was to interview 12 high school principals who have been in the position for a minimum of five years. When I first considered this study in 2006, approximately 75% of the principals in the 50 member-school OK Conference had five years or more on the job. At the time of this study, in 2012, the pool of participants from the OK conference eligible to participate was approximately 35%. Essentially, in the past six years, the number of principals who have been in the job for at least five years has decreased. This became evident when talking to administrators and principals and trying to use snowball sampling to find prospective participates for the study.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Patton (2002) stated that qualitative findings grow out of three kinds of data collection which includes in-depth interviews, direct observation, and written documents. The spoken or written word always has a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully worded the questions are or how the answers are coded (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The goal, however, is to get a sense of the participants’ lived experiences as principals in a high school. Individual semi-structured interviews with each principal was the method of data collection.

Through email I set up a time to meet with each principal for a semi-structured interview. The location of the interviews was at the respective school site of the principal in order to make sure that the participant felt comfortable in his or her natural setting. All of the interviews took place in the early morning during the months of December, 2011, and January, 2012. Eleven of the interviews occurred in the principal’s office in the building where they work. One interview was conducted in a slightly different manner.
This principal agreed to meet me at his office in the morning. When I arrived, however, he had a family situation arise where he needed to go back home and get one of his children on the bus to school. I was invited to ride along with him and conduct the interview in the car while we rode to his house. I then finished the interview in this principal’s living room while he needed to be at his house to be sure his children were awake and getting ready for school. Once his children were off to school, we drove back to his office at which time the interview was completed.

Each participant was informed of any risks associated with participation in the study and assured of his or her ability to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time. The participants signed a written consent to participate and returned it to me by fax before we set up the actual interview. Permission was obtained from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of Western Michigan University to assist in safeguarding the rights of study participants. A copy of the permission is in Appendix C. Participants were also notified before the interview that after the interview a written transcript would be emailed to them to check for accuracy.

Instrumentation

The most widely used approach to the production of qualitative data is interviews with participants (Polkinghorne, 2005). The purpose of the interview is to gain a full and detailed account from a person who has had the experience that is being studied. Phenomenological interviewing involves a discussion of lived experiences and rests on the assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The data collection method for this particular study was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviewing combines the
flexibility of the open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the semi-structured interview to produce focused qualitative data (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999).

An outline that had been developed from the research questions was used to guide the semi-structured interview with each participant. This interview guide can be found in Appendix D and was used by me to provide a guide to the conversation with each participant.

Each principal was interviewed for approximately 60 minutes and the interview was audio-recorded. Permission was sought from the participant to have their interview audio-recorded and then later transcribed by either a transcriptionist or me. The interview was based on some open-ended questions and I took field notes during the interview. After the interview, I personally transcribed each interview within one week of meeting with the principal.

Rudestam and Newton (2001) discussed member checking and state that it is common in the qualitative literature for researchers to return to the participants and present the written narrative with the intent to confirm the accuracy of the transcription. After an interview was transcribed, it was emailed to the participant for member checking so that the content of the semi-structured interviews could be verified by the participants. Creswell (2003) stated that by member checking, the researcher takes the final report back to the participants to determine whether the participants feel that the information is accurate. Participants were asked to return the transcript with any additional notes or comments to the researcher via email. Each participant replied to me stating that no changes were needed on their respective transcript.
Data Analysis

The goal of a phenomenological analysis is to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people (Patton, 2002). The first step in data analysis is for the researcher to describe personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. This would be a full description of my experiences as a high school principal as I served in the position for seven years. This was done so that the focus could be directed to the participants in the study (Creswell, 2007). I attempted to obtain a full description of my own experience of the phenomenon called the epoche. Epoche requires the elimination of suppositions and the raising of knowledge above every possible doubt (Moustaskas, 1994).

In the epoche, the goal was to set aside prejudices, biases, and preconceived ideas about the topic to be researched. I composed my epoche before conducting any participant interviews and filed it in my personal files. It is not included here as part of this dissertation.

Each transcript was read several times to obtain an overall feeling from them. Most qualitative researchers begin their data analysis by reading and rereading in its entirety all the information they have collected, including interview transcripts and field notes to get a feel for the whole (Creswell, 2007). In this case, by personally transcribing each interview and re-reading each transcript multiple times, I could get a sense of the experiences of the principals with regard to their job satisfaction and longevity.

From the verbatim transcripts of each of the participant interviews the following processes were used to analyze the data. First, a method of coding the data needed to be established. No one is intuitive enough to read a series of transcripts and immediately see
the patterns within them (Auerbach, 2003). According to Auerbach, the central idea of
coding is to move from raw text to research concerns in small steps, each step building on
the previous one.

First, each statement was considered with respect to significance for a description
of the experience. The aspects of the data most relevant to answering the research
questions needed to be determined. Foss and Waters (2007) describe using a unit of
analysis. A unit of analysis is a concept, idea, or action that illuminates the significant
features of the data so that the questions can be answered (p. 187). Moutstakas (1994)
describes this process in a similar way and calls it horizontalization. Each nonrepetitive,
nonoverlapping statement was noted in the margin as these are the invariant horizons or
meaning units of the experience.

I reviewed each transcript and each statement and coded it as it related to a
particular unit of analysis. I looked for excerpts that contained units of analysis and
marked them with a code in the margin. After coding, each statement connected to a unit
of analysis was cut out. I also examined my field notes and correlated any of the
participant’s body language or actions with their statements when examining the units of
analysis. Next, the related units of analysis or meaning units were clustered into general
themes.

When looking at the relevant text, different research participants often used the
same or similar words and phrases to express the same idea. Auerbach (2003) calls these
repeating ideas. The goal was to take repeating ideas that have something in common and
group them together in a theme. Auerbach defines a theme as an implicit topic that
organizes a group of repeating ideas. From the general themes, sub-themes were
developed as well. These themes and sub-themes were then synthesized into a description and organized according to the three research questions.

The themes and sub-themes were organized as they related to each of the three research questions and that is presented in Chapter IV. I also worked to look beneath the affect inherent in the experience to deeper meaning for the principals who were interviewed. The goal was to provide a synthesis of meanings and essences of the phenomenon, which focused on the common experiences of the participants (Moutstakas, 1994).

**The Researcher**

As a person who served as a high school principal for seven years, I am very aware of the pressures and complexity of the job. I find job satisfaction and longevity of high school principals an area of research that can provide a great deal of insight for those in the field. If the building leader is critical to the success of any school, then finding ways to nurture, develop, and keep leaders in these positions will be essential for keeping the educational system in the United States competitive.

I am intrigued by principals who remain in the high school principalship for a significant length of time. Job satisfaction of educators in general is an interesting topic for me. I believe there is no greater job than the education of our youth. To find people who are dissatisfied with this line of work is disheartening. Research done in this area may be able to lend educational, business, and community leaders some insight into school leadership and more specifically, high school leadership. I am also curious as to why several leaders I know have left the high school principalship. While many of these leave to seek employment as central office administrators and superintendents, numerous
educators have commented on how difficult the high school principal position has become.

I have also held a position on the executive council of the Ottawa-Kent (OK) Conference which has 50 member schools and represents the building leaders of those schools. Additionally, I was President of the OK – Black division of the OK Conference. I was an active member of the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP). The high school principalship is a position that I value highly and want to promote in a positive way.

Chapter III Summary

This qualitative study used phenomenological methods. The participant group included 12 high school principals in Michigan. The scope of the study was limited to the lived experiences of the 12 high school principals who agreed to participate in the research project. Merriam (1998) writes that phenomenology involves using data that are the participants’ firsthand experience of the phenomenon. To gather these data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. This is due to the fact that interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them (Merriam, 1998).

Following the interviews, transcriptions and field notes were analyzed for a description of the experiences of high school principals who have attained longevity. It is hoped that knowledge from this study can be used to promote further study of the high school principal position. Let us now turn to Chapter IV, where the findings of the study will be presented.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to explore the factors that contribute to, or detract from a high school principal’s job satisfaction and longevity. This chapter addresses the findings of the study. This qualitative study examined the experiences of 12 Michigan high school principals, each with a minimum of five years in the position. I wanted to gain an understanding of their ability to remain in the position for an extended period of time and develop an understanding of what these individuals find satisfying about their job.

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were examined:

1. What experiences in their work do high school principals describe as contributing to their job satisfaction?

2. What experiences do principals describe as impeding or detracting from their job satisfaction?

3. How do principals explain their longevity in the job—what are the factors that contribute to their longevity and what are the factors, if any, that detract or threaten their longevity?

A description of the research participants will be provided along with an analysis of the interviews, and the research findings gathered from interviews of 12 Michigan high school principals.
Overview of Methodology

Purposeful sampling was used to identify potential candidates to participate in the study. Based upon my experience as a principal in the Ottawa-Kent (OK) Conference, I selected those individuals who may have met the criteria for the study. The OK conference is comprised of 50 schools in the western region of Michigan. Sixteen principals were identified as potential participants and were invited to participate in the study via email. A total of 13 principals responded and indicated that they would be interested in participating in the study. However, of the 13, two principals replied that they only had four and four and one-half years, respectively, on the job; therefore, they did not meet the criteria for the study.

After getting notification of their willingness to participate, a consent form was faxed to each individual after an explanation of the study was provided via email or over the phone. Snowball sampling led me to one other individual who was willing to participate. This person was a principal in a high school not part of the OK conference, yet had been on the job for over five years, so this person was included in the study. This made for a total of 12 participants.

Participants

To protect the anonymity of the participants, a summary table of the demographics and characteristics of each principal cannot be provided. As a result, a synopsis of the participants is provided in the paragraphs that follow.

Of the 12 individuals who participated in the study, there were 11 males and one female. Eleven of the participants were principals in high school buildings in the West Michigan area and one was a principal in Northern Michigan. Table 1 shows the ages of
the participants. Two principals were in the 41–45 years of age range, three principals were in the 46–50 age range, two principals in the 51–55 age range, and five principals were in the 56–60 age range.

Table 1

Age of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range in Years</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41–45</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46–60</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51–55</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56–60</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows a display of the size of the buildings the principals led. Four principals were in charge of high schools with the number of students totaling 500–999, four principals led buildings with a student population between 1,000–1,499, two principals led buildings with student numbers totaling between 1,500–1,999, and two principals were in charge of high schools with student counts numbering over 2,000.

Table 2

Size of Buildings in Which Participants Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500–999</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000–1,499</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,500–1,999</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000+</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All of the buildings would be considered to be servicing populations in either suburban or rural areas and none of the principals were working in high schools in an urban area. The average 2012 graduation rate of the schools that the 12 principals led was 92.9%, while the state of Michigan average was 74.3%. This includes a range of graduation rates from 85.3 to 97.6%. The 2012 average composite ACT score for 11th grade students ranged from 18.1 to 24.6 with the average ACT composite score from all 12 schools being 21.2. The average in the state of Michigan was 19.6. It should be noted that while there are urban high schools located in the western region of Michigan, none of the principals in an urban setting had at least five years of service in their current position; therefore, that demographic is not represented in this study.

In terms of the highest level of education attainment, Table 3 shows the highest degree earned by participants. One principal had a doctorate, two had earned educational specialist degrees, eight had master’s degrees, and one had completed only a bachelor’s degree.

Table 3

*Highest Level of Education Attainment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B.A. or B.S.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. A.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed.S.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eleven of the principals started their careers in education as a teacher right after earning a bachelor’s degree. The remaining principal had another career in the health field before switching to education, teaching for a few years and then moving into educational administration. Seven of the principals got their start in educational administration as an athletic director and then moved on to an assistant principal position before becoming a high school principal. The other five individuals got their start in administration as an assistant principal and then became a building principal.

There were varying years of experience with each of the participants and these data are shown in Table 4. All of the participants had at least five years of experience as a high school principal.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three of the principals had six years on the job, three principals had eight years on the job, and the rest of the years of experience were seven, nine, and 19 years, respectively, in the same building.

One individual had 10 years at one school before moving to the current high school where this person has completed 16 years for a total of 26 years in the position. Another principal had six years and four years, respectively, in two other high school buildings before going to the current position where this person has served for the last nine years. Finally, one participant had a total of 35 years as a high school principal in multiple buildings with the last eight in this person’s current setting.

When scheduling and conducting the interviews, each principal was given a number. Principals in the study were numbered starting with Principal 1, Principal 2, etc., through Principal 12. In reporting the results of this study, each principal will be referred to as “he” or “him” to protect the identity of the female participant. Additionally, when direct quotes are shared in this results section, the identifying names of events that occurred at a high school or the names of other identifying factors have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants. Occasionally, I use the word “blank,” in quotation marks because even a pseudonym might give away the identity of a participant.

**Themes**

The taped interviews were listened to and transcribed by me. As a result of reading and rereading each transcript, coding excerpts, and cutting out and sorting all relevant excerpts into groups, eight themes developed from the conversations with the participants. Three of the themes related specifically to research question one, and four themes that emerged related to research question two. With regard to research question
three, there were 10 sub-themes that emerged. Each of the themes and multiple sub-themes will be presented along with the support for each.

Overall, the experiences of high school principals and the factors that contribute to or detract from their job satisfaction and longevity were expressed ideas around the following major themes:

1. Working with and Influencing Students
2. Leading and Managing Change
3. Doing a Challenging and Important Job
4. Negative Adult Behaviors
5. Bureaucracy and Mandates
6. Lack of Support and Trust
7. Time Commitment
8. Factors Influencing Longevity

When principals participated in the semi-structured interview, many of their thoughts and comments provided insights that answered more than one of the research questions. Essentially, there was overlap in each principal’s reflections in terms of addressing facets of job satisfaction and longevity. When principals discussed what they found satisfying about their job, they described a concept as it related to being both satisfying and contributing to their longevity. When principals reported what they found dissatisfying about their job, they talked about concepts as it related to both job dissatisfaction and how this could lead to a principal not attaining longevity in a position.

Each of the themes and associated sub-themes are summarized in Table 5 and will be developed and discussed in the pages that follow.
Table 5

**Distribution of Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with &amp; influencing students</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing student growth</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessing student success</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with students</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading &amp; managing change</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with staff</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact others/make a difference</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating others to change</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum &amp; instruction</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing a challenging &amp; important job</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace of job/variety</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing leaders</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative adult behaviors</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative teacher behavior</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative parent behavior</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucracy and 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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continual pace of change</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paperwork</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of control</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support/trust</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time commitment</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow career path</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit &amp; culture of the organization</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School board, superintendent &amp; central office support</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community support</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff &amp; collegial support</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance in professional and personal life</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still growing professionally</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent and competitive personality</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive nature</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work ethic</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>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes Related to Research Question One

Theme 1: Working with and Influencing Students

After getting some demographic information from the participant, the interview began with some conversation around what the principal enjoyed about their job and what they found satisfying. Principal 8 summed up the working with and influencing students theme concisely when he said, “The best thing about my job? Wow, the kids.” In terms of the day-to-day aspects of the high school principal position, 11 of the 12 participants in the study specifically stated that the work they do with and for students is a major aspect of what they enjoy about their job. Principal 6 stated, “While I had strong relationships with students that I developed in the teaching and coaching arena, as a principal, the number of kids you have an influence over is much greater.”

Principal 5 reported, “I love the kids here, really. I got to be careful how I say that I guess, but I just like watching them grow.” Principal 8 adds, “I’ve been excited as a high school principal. I enjoy it. To me it’s a good job. To be able to affect kids in a real positive way; it gives me energy.” Participants in the study talked at length about their experiences in working with and influencing students. Principal 9 summarized his satisfying work with students as follows, “I think for me it’s helping build students that have a sense of community.”

When asked specifically about what they like about their work with high school students, each principal was able to describe specific things they enjoy about this aspect of the job. Working with students encompasses a broad range of tasks and duties and can have multiple meanings. Therefore, this broad theme was divided into four sub-themes. They are: seeing student growth, witnessing student success, having positive interactions...
with students, and building relationships with students. Each of these four sub-themes will be explained.

**Sub-theme 1.1: Seeing student growth.** Student growth is something that educators are entrusted to build upon as they work with young people. Half of the principals reported finding satisfaction in seeing students grow physically, emotionally, and academically. This development also leads to some degree of satisfaction in fulfilling the mission of their organization as a result. Principal 7 stated, “I like working with students and I get to help mold and kind of help shape those kids.” When Principal 8 was asked to talk more extensively about the influence on student growth, he reflected,

Seeing that kid come in as a freshman, then four years later when they’re graduating, think wow, physically, emotionally, they’ve grown so much, and I think seeing kids go from that level of just being introduced to responsibility and the potential success later in life and then seeing them become successful and turning into something that you may have been a part of that; that’s probably the best thing.

Principal 9 goes even further and stated, “We can coach or guide students but in the end it’s them.” This principal went on to describe a student who struggled in school, ended up going to a community college to get her grades up and then went to Michigan State University after not having the most successful high school career. This principal gushed, “Watching her dreams come true,” was the satisfying example that this principal shared. Principal 10 referenced the fact that it’s reassuring that when students come back at the holiday breaks from post-secondary schooling, they report to him that they feel prepared.
Principal 11 talked about the rewarding conversations with parents at recent parent-teacher conference sessions. He could see the parents “light up” and verbalized, “You know look where they were as freshmen and look at now, and they’re going to make it after I saw how confused, angry, and frustrated these parents have been throughout the course of their student’s high school career.” This principal continues,

I love seeing kids, in fact some of the best conversations I had at parent-teacher conferences were parents of at-risk kids who are making it. We talked about the growth that their child has achieved from being a 9th grader to now being a senior and really you start seeing them take ownership for what’s going on in their life, you see them, and so those are the success stories that keep you going.

Principal 6 answered, “Taking a kid, wherever they’re at, and making them better. Creating productive citizens. Getting them to not be so absorbed in the present, but getting them to look in the future.”

Seeing student growth was one aspect of working with students that principals believed contributed to their job satisfaction. These principals were excited to talk about seeing that growth and seeing student success.

**Sub-theme 1.2: Witnessing student success.** A second sub-theme that came out of the interviews as it relates to working with and influencing students and contributes to principal job satisfaction was witnessing student success. In addition to seeing the growth in students from the freshmen year to the senior year, half of the principals talked specifically about the success stories they have witnessed in their careers. Principal 5 contended, “Our scores are going up; that satisfies me.” Most of the principals were happy to talk about seeing students succeed. Principal 12 said, “The experience of
dealing with students and having them finding success; regardless of how little or big the success is. That’s the intrinsic reward of being an administrator; because most of the rewards are intrinsic.”

Principal 9 reflected on how a student came back and told him, “You know I still think about some of the things you would say; you know it just took me a while to see it.” He added, “And those are kind of neat things to hear.” Principal 9 also revealed that the enjoyment of seeing those students develop into the people that they’re really going to be when they walk away from the high school contributed to the perks of the job. This principal went on to describe a sizeable community service project the students had completed and how satisfying it was to see that, stating,

"Seeing that student whose light bulb finally clicks. You know I talk to parents who are discouraged because their kid doesn’t know what they want to do, or their kid might be failing some classes or whatever and just having that conversation with them saying, hey, everyone matures at a different level.

Principal 8 initially talked about the satisfying work with kids as a part of the job that was enjoyable. When asked what he meant, he replied,

"Seeing kids develop, being successful, being part of who they are, helping them make good decisions versus bad ones. Watching that old tradition, see a kid come in as a freshman, then four years later when they’re graduating, I think wow, physically, emotionally, they’ve grown so much, and I think seeing kids go from that level of being introduced to responsibility and the potential success later in life and then seeing them become successful and turning into something that you may have been a part of, that’s probably the best thing."
Principal 4 commented,
Definitely anytime when I see a student succeed, especially when it’s a student who has just had a really hard time. It might be something as simple as passing a class, or you spend a lot of time with that student in the office and just getting him or her to attend school. Just anytime you see that glow in the student’s eyes when they’ve done something well. You know, graduation is a great night; you get to hand diplomas to kids that you wondered if they’d get there. Any time a student achieves, especially if they weren’t expected to.
Principal 4 goes on,
You know you might be working with an at-risk student and just getting them to school; the day that you shake kids’ hands and give them a diploma but anytime when students are succeeding and you see success, especially when it’s been a long road for a student. I think that’s the most important thing that stands out.
When asked what makes the job enjoyable, Principal 8 stated,
Seeing kids be successful. Seeing a kid pass a class that normally he would have some struggles with; those successes and the opportunity to be a part of that is pretty much a turn-on for me; whether it’s reduction of failure in a core area or better reading scores, or those kinds of things. I don’t know if that’s the competitive nature in me it’s just, you know, the way I’m hard-wired, but those things are probably the things I like on a daily basis, just being part of the grind and moving forward with student success.
Principals talked about success and how it comes in many forms, but several principals talked of the success that includes getting a student to graduation. One
principal, Principal 7 in particular echoed many of the sentiments, “You know, when you get to those points and I love it at graduation, you when the kids are walking across and not with every kid because it can’t be, but you know so many stories.”

**Sub-theme 1.3: Student interactions.** A third sub-theme in the area of influencing and working with students pertains specifically to the personal interactions that principals have with students on a daily basis. Five principals talked specifically about student interactions. Principal 1 stated,

I enjoy the interactions I have with students. I’m out greeting the students as they come in in the morning to get a chance to talk to them. After school, I do the same. In between classes, I do the same. I enjoy, well I don’t know if I enjoy, lunchroom duty. The interaction I enjoy. Before Christmas break, I went into our ESL classroom and they were learning states and capitals and they had a board game on the floor and I sat on the floor and learned along with them.

Principal 6 shared some similar thoughts when asked what he likes about coming to his job every day. His response was,

Honestly, you’re going to fall out of your chair on this one. Lunch. Lunch supervision. Just give me a time to interact with kids. You know give me a time to ask how the basketball game went last night, and give me an opportunity to talk to the cheerleaders about their next routine and give me an opportunity to talk to the debate team about going to the state finals again.

Principal 4 adds, “I know at least once a day there’s going to be something positive with a student. There might be some negatives, too, but you always know that there’s going to be something positive with a student during the day.”
Principal 3 took a slightly different angle on this topic. “I like organizing a lot of student activities, assemblies, student government. I’m the contact with student government.” This principal talked about how he enjoys the interactions that come with that role. Additionally, this principal went on, “I’m walking down the hallway, the bell rings and there’s three teachers just cracking up and I think how fun and how cool for these kids to see and be a part of positive adult interactions.” Principal 10 stated, “While we have some students that don’t initially prosper in the building, trying to forge a relationship with them to help them find success is both challenging and rewarding.”

**Sub-theme 1.4: Relationships with students.** A fourth sub-theme in influencing and working with students is the fact that principals enjoy building relationships with students. Eight of the principals reported building relationships as a positive aspect of their job. Building relationships with teachers, support staff, parents, co-workers, and students are all part of this equation. Principal 12 lent some insight by sharing that he felt relating to students comes natural or easy for him. When asked with what areas of your job are you most satisfied, Principal 12 replied, “Relationships. Students come first, staff comes second, parents come third.” He went on to talk about relationships in the context of the entire organization but that building relationships with students was paramount to his satisfaction.

Principal 11 talked extensively about how building relationships with students is a satisfying part of his work,

I was pretty much an at-risk kid, so that’s where my passion is and I would say a lot of my best work probably will never show up in some standardized score or some other mechanism to measure the success of our school. It’s really
individually when you try to make those connections and I try to model that with our staff, too. We talk about the 3 R’s; rigor, relevance, and relationships and really the priority is relationships because if you don’t have relationships, you don’t have anything.

Principal 3 also talked about student relationships, “I think I just relate to kids well.” When recounting another administrator that Principal 3 admired, he realized that what he admired and tried to emulate was the relationship with the kids. By seeing this in his mentor, he realized that one could be in administration and could still have great relationships with kids. This principal felt that he had continued strong relationships with students even after moving into administration. This principal also used that as his motivation to go into administration as well stating, “I thought I had good relationships with kids and I thought I handled behavior very well.” These factors were the impetus used to move into the principal position and he felt because of his talents and focus, he was able to find satisfaction in administration as a high school principal.

Principal 8 talked about relationships with students in terms of being satisfied with the job, student success, and explaining his longevity in the job,

I think you can have any leadership style you want but I think the key part is the kids know you care. And I think the kids that I’ve been able to develop relationships with know that. Being able to care about student success combined with wanting them to achieve.

When asked what makes the high school principal position enjoyable, Principals 4, 5, 6, 9, and 11 commented in similar ways. Principal 4 stated, “First of all, the opportunity to be around students, I think is A# 1. It’s different than teaching and
coaching but you’re still around students and you’re able to have an effect on them.”
Principal 5 answered unequivocally, “Kids. I still get my biggest joy out of kids. And I’ve always said I don’t go to work, I go to school. And when that changes, then it’s time for me to retire.” Principal 6 replied,

The relationships with the kids. We’ve got tremendous kids in this building. There’s 825 of them, and I’m going to guess I’m at about 600 where I could pick them out and name them and ask them how their day is and ask them about something on a personal level.

Principal 9 also stated,

The kids. I would say the biggest obstacle for me to go into central office is that. And people say, well you don’t see the kids. You can see kids as a high school principal if you set your mind to it.

Principal 11 quipped, “I really enjoy the kids.”

It appears that high school principals find their work satisfying whenever they can interact, build relationships with, and help students grow and succeed.

**Theme 2: Leading and Managing Change**

The notion of change is prevalent in the field of education today and has been for several years. School principals are pivotal players in educational change and reform (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). A second major theme that emerged from the research has to do with this topic. Eleven of the 12 principals report feeling satisfaction in their job as they navigate the rapidly changing educational landscape. This can be a double-edged sword though as some reported finding the constant change tiring and detracting from
their satisfaction. In this section, I will explore how the component of leading and managing change impacted principal’s job satisfaction.

Change is viewed by principals as a complex and situated process emanating from their desire or need to solve problems or make improvements (Starr, 2011). Engaging in school change requires principals to move from being managers of the status quo to facilitators of reform (Frederick, 1992). Four sub-themes emerged as components of leading and managing change high school building. They are: relationships with staff, impacting others and making a difference, motivating others to change, and curriculum and instruction. These sub-themes are organized in this study under the leading and managing change theme as a result of research regarding principals leading change in buildings.

Dinham and Scott (1998) found that positive student and collegial relationships increase individual teacher and administrative levels of satisfaction with their jobs. Brief and Weiss (2002) found workplace production increases when individuals are satisfied and committed to their job. Brief and Weiss go on to report that for schools, this would imply that principal and teacher attitudes would ripple out to enhance learning environments in schools. It is implied that strong relationships with staff must be built in order to motivate educators to work in the current environment and to manage the dynamically changing needs and requirements.

Principal 2 talked about several initiatives and changes that have occurred over the years and the fact that working toward making his high school better was satisfying for him. When referencing the changing nature of the education field he answered, “I’ve not seen the silver bullet yet. We’ve tried a lot of different things but those are the things
that when I look back at what gets me in each day.” Three other principals noted that part of what excites them and satisfies them about the principalship is the fast pace, the changing nature of the field, and the ability to solve problems related to the fast paced changes. Principal 4 said, “I like the, ever-changing kind of action of it. I guess you could say everything’s always changing. Grass doesn’t grow under your feet.”

Principal 7 mentioned,

I love reading educational theorists and working with those theories about education and kind of playing with those. I like to put things in place, get people on board and reach a goal. It’s even better actually if other people get the credit because it’s going to put more gas in their tank to drive issues in the future.”

This principal worked with his staff to change grading practices and said, “When the light can go on for a teacher, I find those tremendously satisfying.” Principal 7 also expanded on the idea of constant improvement, “I ask myself regularly, how can I improve? What can we do for my building, or for my kids, or my staff?” When asked what the best thing about being the high school principal is, he responded, “You know I think the best thing is you have a laboratory.” It became evident that this principal loves to manage change and thrives on it. He shared a story about how he helped another staff member solve some problems, which he mentioned as another highlight of his job. He views the principalship as an exciting opportunity to try to help shape something bigger.

Principal 8 stated that a major motivation to accept a principalship was to become more a part of the decision-making process. As a result, he finds satisfaction in where the school is currently, in comparison to when he first got there. Principal 11 shared a story where he was a catalyst for change during a moment of crisis, leading to a teacher to
express thanks to him. This principal expressed, “I love having that interaction with them and kind of processing with them. When a young teacher comes in and says they don’t know what to do, I love that problem-solving thing.” Those moments and resulting gratitude from others are things that make the job rewarding for this principal.

In order to manage change and effectively lead a building, principals must be able to motivate, challenge, and nurture staff members to perform at optimal levels. Principals’ relationships with their teachers affect principals’ and teachers’ satisfaction, cohesion, and commitment levels (Price, 2011). Being a leader in education during turbulent times requires the ability to mobilize team players toward a common goal or mission. Principals both welcomed this challenge and found satisfaction during these times by building long-term relationships with teachers.

Principal 8 has been a principal in multiple buildings, and he talked about how he’s been able to find job satisfaction and rewarding work in every situation.

Every place I’ve ever been, whether it’s been urban, rural, suburban, has improved greatly, whether it’s been a poor performing school and we’ve been able to do some real neat things or if it’s a top end school, like my current assignment, and still being able to improve that. So that improvement factor is something that I’m most proud of. I wouldn’t say it’s just test scores. It’s being able to accomplish a particular goal with faculty and the building, you know this is focus that we’ve got to achieve.

Countless books have been published on the change process, creating the urgency for change, and explaining the need to change to prepare 21st century learners. Change in organizations does not just happen. Instead, leaders must mobilize staff toward a common
vision and create a climate conducive to change, and establish relationships. Trusted leaders are able to guide staff through the change process.

Sub-theme 2.1: Relationships with staff. The first identified sub-theme under leading and managing change was relationships with staff. Eight of the 12 principals noted that the relationships they have built, and continue to have with staff members are necessary to lead a building and also contribute to their satisfaction. Principal 2 talked about this at length,

I have really established strong relationships with my staff. What keeps me ticking in this job, without question, are the relationships that I’ve been able to develop. I want to make sure they understand that I truly value who they are. I think I make people feel comfortable in my presence. Without a doubt, what makes this job enjoyable, is the relationships I have with both staff and students. Principal 3 echoed these sentiments by saying the characteristics that make this job enjoyable for him are,

I have great people. I have the most fantastic people around me. This building has a real positive culture. I think what has made it so successful and a characteristic that is really important is that you have to show the staff that you care and appreciate them.

Principal 5 identified the relationships with staff as “the only thing that’s keeping me here.” Principal 5 talked about how he is eligible to retire and has considered other career options but, “There’s just so many people here that I care about, I guess. That’s the biggest thing. I feel indebted to them because they’ve allowed me to be in this position
for this long.” These comments address both this principal’s job satisfaction and the longevity that he has attained.

Principals 1, 6, 7, 9, and 10 also shared their thoughts about the importance of building relationships with staff and their ultimate job satisfaction. Principal 1 shared,

It all goes back to that relationship piece that you have with staff and students. We have a great professional relationship and they know that I care deeply about them. Relationships are very important to me. I think I do a good job of building rapport with staff and students and parents. I believe I’m a good listener. I’ve enjoyed it, and I think it all goes back to that, the relationship piece that you have with staff and students.

Principal 6 imparted, “I enjoy the relationships with staff and they very much view me as an educational leader.” Principal 7 stated, “I think, without question, to me, the job is first and foremost a human relations position.” Principal 9 adds,

Now that I’m here, I can’t picture myself anywhere else. This building has an incredible culture to it, and feel to it; that’s an awesome position. I’m pretty good at building relationships with people. Some people take longer than others but I think I’m pretty good at that and I think it helps in a position like this, whether it’s building relationships with the staff, the students, and the parents.

Principal 10 disclosed,

Relationships with the staff, the administrative colleagues, with students, certainly. I always tell people my favorite part of the day is passing time. It’s a chance for me to get out and see the kids and check in on staff. A difficult part of being the boss so to speak in the building is trying to develop that relationship
with the staff. I know the decisions I make are not always the most popular but I think people trust me.

Principals shared their thoughts about the importance of building relationships with staff members and how this part of their job contributed to their satisfaction and in some cases, their longevity. I will now describe the next sub-theme which falls under the leading and managing change category.

Sub-theme 2.2: Impact others/make a difference. A second sub-theme of leading and managing change is the concept that principals talked about was impacting and making a difference in the lives of others. Half of the principals reported this as something that contributes to their satisfaction. A question posed to Principal 12 was “What would you tell someone that was thinking about becoming a high school principal? The response was, “It’s the best job in the world. It’s an opportunity to have an impact with an age group that can be articulate, and forward thinkers and that they can do things that they can see success in.”

Principal 11 was asked, “What’s good about what you do?” The response was, You know what I really like about what I do is the fact that when I can have the light go on with some teachers or some kids or some parents and really get back to say, wow that really made a difference.

Principal 11 goes on further, “I guess passion to make a difference in somebody’s life is, you know, I’ve always had that; the need to help.”

When talking about making a difference, Principal 7 says that if people truly want to make a difference in education, the high school principalship can afford them the best position to really make a difference,
Even though you might not have all of the answers or it might not even be our problem to solve, that you’re there as someone who can validate them and work with them. When we can find those things and they go the way you want them to go and then all of a sudden a teacher, a student, a parent and you come back and you know that was what we consider a win.

Principal 1, when talking about considering other positions in education, stated, “It boils down to making an impact on students.” Principal 4 follows with, “I’m not saying we don’t have our issues, but it’s a good fit for me right now and I believe I’m still making a difference.” This individual attributed the fit of his leadership style and the community to his longevity as well as his satisfaction with his work. Principal 9 talked about how the things they have been able to do have both impacted the building and the community. In this case, the principal was referencing a large community service project that brought personal pride and satisfaction.

**Sub-theme 2.3: Motivating others to change.** Understanding that principals are needed as change agents, a third sub-theme under leading and managing change is motivating others to change. The notion of fostering change in others was mentioned by five principals as professionally satisfying. “I think that is one of the best things about this job,” stated Principal 7. He elaborates,

To get that person to the finish line; or to get that person to a position where they grew, or now they’re going to be more successful, they’re going to be doing this or that. When you can kind of look back and, it’s hard, but the hard is what makes it good.
Principal 2 talked about relationships with his assistant principal and teachers and how growing and changing together has been positive for him,

But when I start to think about those connections, I spend most of my time with my assistant. I have a core of staff that are my team leaders, department chairs. Teachers that have been around for a long time, I’ve been able to grow up with them professionally.

In this instance, Principal 2 was talking about how relationships and managing change assists with his longevity as well as job satisfaction.

Principal 5 was reflecting on how he transitioned from assistant principal to principal, and added this thought, “When I became the building leader I became an instructional leader. And I don’t think the staff, the veteran staff was sure of that. I think they’re sure now. That’s pretty satisfying.” Principal 6 elaborated on how he manages change and enjoys working with staff. He talked about the consensus model used to make decisions in his building, “Collaboration is huge.” He felt a sense of reward being able to implement a consensus model after a lengthy process full of changing dynamics.

Principal 11, when reflecting on the changing landscape in education, said,

You know that I’ve had people say I can get a little intense at times but the goal is always, how can we do it better, more efficiently, you know, I mean everybody, everybody’s being compressed now. But it’s fun; I enjoy that part.

Principal 11 adds when talking about managing change, “It’s being a part of that progression and modeling what good administration is and how you handle problems and work through things.”
Sub-theme 2.4: Curriculum and instruction. A fourth and final sub-theme in the leading and managing change category includes curriculum and instruction. Three principals mention curriculum and instruction as areas that are satisfying about their job. Principal 1 stated,

I think the closer I get to teaching and learning; that’s my comfort zone. That’s when I’m most happy. The closer I get to teaching and learning, the more that I enjoy my job. I enjoy going into classrooms to observe students and teachers. I enjoy our building leadership meetings, when we have department chair meetings and we talk about curriculum and we can identify some of the areas we need to boost up and what are some of the areas we are doing well.

Principal 7, who refers to viewing the high school as a laboratory, purports,

I enjoy the opportunities that exist every day in order to do, you know, in order to kind of work your model and work what goes on. It’s a challenge of trying to maintain management while still being creative and working with the instructional framework. Those are tough balances.

Principal 5 shared, “What satisfies me is being a curriculum person, to direct instruction. I wasn’t sure if I could do that.”

On the contrary, one principal specifically stated, “Curriculum is not my forte.” In this instance, the assistant principal handles most of the curriculum and instruction responsibilities. This principal handles many of the other duties with staff, students, and student activities. So, what might be satisfying for one principal may cause angst for another individual based on strengths and preferences.
Theme 3: Doing a Challenging and Important Job

When discussing the position of the high school principal, each of the individuals displayed a sense of pride and enjoyment while talking about their position, the building within which they work, and the people they work with. When asked, what would you tell somebody who was thinking about going into the high school principalship, seven of the principal’s responses centered around the importance of the position and the fact that the challenges are exciting. In this section, the theme of the challenges and importance of the job will be explored first. Then, two sub-themes will be discussed. One sub-theme is the pace and variety of the job, and the second sub-theme is the fact that principals find satisfaction in developing leaders. The views of principals regarding the importance of developing new leaders speaks to both the challenge as well as the ultimate value of their position.

Principal 1 stated, “I view, and this is, this may be egotistical or whatever, but I view the high school principal as the most important job in the district.” He goes on to give evidence to support his view:

Students come in, they have no idea what they want to do and so our goal is to get them to be thinking about something. You know, be thinking about a career, be thinking about the military. Those that are more college-centered then our goal is to get them to be as competitive with anyone else that is going to enter that same university that they’re entering. I think it’s a huge task.

As this principal talked, he was happy to share and his body language indicated that he enjoys this challenge. Continuing on, he said,
I think it’s a, it’s a big job and then to complicate that, with you know, in our case, you know we have ninety some teachers, you know, getting them on the same page. Getting all the ninth grade English teachers thinking the same way, and all the Algebra II teachers thinking the same way; it’s a huge task.

Principal 9 replied, “Last night I was at an orchestra concert that they put on with the group, “blank.” That’s incredible. You know, to have, to be able to do that. Yes, it adds to that pace but it’s never, certainly never boring.” He went on to talk about how the challenges of meeting the expectations of all constituent groups. Attending performances, art programs, and athletic contests lend to the importance of the job as students, parents, and the community like to see the building principals supporting all of those extracurricular groups. Principal 8 had some similar thoughts:

Ah exciting job, never boring. I think it keeps you young, you have to have energy to get it completed, but to me it would be an excellent career choice. The only thing I find myself saying that would not be necessarily negative but an honest warning would be it’s not a great job to make a lot of money in. I like the environment the surroundings, the kids, the atmosphere. You know everybody is in first place on September 1, whether it’s football, the challenge of raising scores, you know going after something as uniquely strange as what the state may put in front of you. All those things are challenges to me.

When asked what he liked about coming in every day, Principal 8 further said, “Checking off my to-do list. Just so it makes me feel like I’ve got some things accomplished.”

Principal 11 added,
Just making sure, because you wake up in the middle of the night, that’s right, we got to do this; I want to make sure we get this in front of the staff, and I want to make sure this is going right for professional development and so, you know. The stress is exhilarating, but it’s also stress.

Principal 2 sums it up these thoughts succinctly by stating, “I think there’s challenges today, that we face educationally that we’ve not faced before. That also is intriguing to me and keeps me going.”

Sub-theme 3.1: Pace of the job/variety. As principals describe the challenges of the high school principal position, the pace of the job was mentioned by six participants. This is the first sub-theme under the challenges and importance of the job. The pace and variety of tasks encountered in the high school principal position were things that six principals specifically talked about as being something they enjoy.

Principal 1 said, “I don’t think I would be very good in a space that didn’t have a lot of activity going on, even though the activity drives you nuts sometimes because you don’t get anything done.” Later he stated, “So I think that challenge I enjoy. I also enjoy the various functions, the various activities. I enjoy the talent shows, I enjoy the plays, I enjoy the athletic piece, the music piece.”

Principal 7 replied, “I like that there’s, a lot of times, a number of balls in the air.”

Principal 9 responded,

Your “to do” list can run, you might as well just keep adding to it, and cross it off when you can. And I enjoy that. I enjoy the pace, and the different things that come up all the time. I don’t know that I could ever be in a job where I had to do the same thing every single day.
Principal 12 shared his thoughts:

There was a point in my professional career where I said, are you happy doing what you’re doing? And my response was, you know, I finally am. I enjoy being a high school principal. There’s always something on your burner. That thing (points to phone) will ring. I’m in an active building with over 500 students and 35 staff so it’s constant action, movement, spontaneity, and variety.

Principal 11, when asked about the satisfying things about his position, said,

Just the whole spectrum of things going on. I just enjoy all of it. I mean I have ADD so it’s; and you have to have it. And the volume of things you have to tackle in any one day. My passion kinda goes that, I love having the whole spectrum of stuff, although that gets pretty overbearing sometimes.

Principal 4 had a similar thought: “As crazy as it sounds, but I kinda like the; the ever-changing, um, kind of action of it.”

**Sub-theme 3.2: Developing leaders.** When discussing the importance of the position coupled with what they enjoy about the job, five of the principals talked about developing teacher leaders and mentoring aspiring administrators. The principals expressed a sense of responsibility and pride in this mentoring capacity. This was identified as a second sub-theme in the larger category of challenges and importance of the job. In fact, Principal 1 and Principal 2 talked at length about this.

Principal 1 said,

I think you have an obligation to mentor and I’ve had the opportunity to mentor a lot of teachers into administration. You know I go to a “blank” meeting, I look around and I’ve worked with half of the people in that organization and you
know, there’s some satisfaction of saying I mentored people that have chosen the next stepping stone and so I think that’s important.

Principal 2 stated, “I think I have a good visceral sense on recognizing leaders.” Further he shared, “I put people in leadership roles and sometimes they don’t see it in them.” This principal talked about how he’s been called “the king maker” as he’s had several assistant principals move up to principalships, central office administrative positions, and superintendencies. He’s very proud of this fact and thoroughly enjoys leading others to become leaders. He said,

I can see leadership in people, and I think part of what I’ve been able to do is empower them to lead here. I believe I can still build and I think it’s an important piece where in this current job as high school principal, I can still build character, I can build leaders, I can build programming in ways that are creative where I’m not dismantling. I think part of my job is to continue to build leaders here so that when I leave here they don’t go, ‘the sky is falling at “blank” high school.

When thinking further he goes on, “It will get better because I was able to put leaders into positions that would continue and then move beyond. I tell my staff, and they know; I learn more every day.” Principal 2 talked at length about how building other leaders was very important, essential, and ultimately satisfying.

Principal 7, when asked about what he likes, replied,

At this point in my career being able to talk to younger administrators. I truly enjoy that. I think sharing my experiences, both good and bad, I think those are some things too that I found very helpful as far as being to give back being able to kind of help shape those next generation of administrators.
Principal 12 enjoys mentoring and building other leaders as well,

Even when I hire assistant principals, I don’t want them to be assistants forever. I want them to get their own and some of my colleagues said the same thing. I don’t want you to be my assistant forever, go get your own building.

When asked with what area are you most satisfied and most proud of, Principal 11 asserted,

I think our mentoring program with teachers and really developing their leadership skills. We have a lot of teachers that have moved to other districts in administration. Watching their growth, their personal growth, from being a probationary teacher, and really letting them analyze their skills and their leadership.”

When analyzing the responses principals shared in the semi-structured interviews, they talked about how the job was challenging and important. There was an evident sense of pride when principals shared their thoughts around the theme of the principalship being a challenging yet important job.

**Themes Related to Research Question Two**

The next themes came about after an analysis of the data related to research question two; what experiences do principals describe as impeding or detracting from their job satisfaction? These four themes include negative adult behaviors, bureaucracy and mandates, lack of support and trust, and the time commitment required of the position.
**Theme 4: Negative Adult Behaviors**

When asked what was not enjoyable about their job, nine of the principals responded with situations or instances where dealing with adult behaviors was frustrating and not enjoyable. This theme was dividing into two categories. Principals talked about frustration in dealing with negative behavior on the part of teachers and negative parent behavior.

**Sub-theme 4.1: Negative teacher behavior.** Half of the participants talked about teacher behavior as it relates to job dissatisfaction. Principal 1 summarized the sentiments best, “I think dealing with adult behavior that is not adult-like, whether it be staff or parents.” He went on to describe how some teachers think they are ‘independent contractors’ and don’t see the need to be part of a teaching team or do not see their role in the big picture of K-12 schooling. He stated, “I had a teacher who complained about following what we all agreed to follow, and basically chose not to.”

Principal 1, expressing frustration with teacher behavior in one instance went on to say that,

Because I’m in a “people business” there are times where I struggle with addressing staff when they don’t do what they are supposed to do without making it World War III, without getting the union involved, without discipline, without fear that they going to run back and tell half the school.

Principal 3 and Principal 12 also referenced working with adults and their behavior as not satisfying or fun. In these cases, they referred to interactions with the teacher’s union as a factor that detracts from their job satisfaction. Principal 3 contends that even though he has what he considers a great staff, sometimes bad decisions made by
teachers can make the job less enjoyable. Principal 12 shared, “Probably the most
difficult thing that I was dealing with is the relationship with the Education Association.”
The tendency of some teachers to not put kids first was an unsatisfying aspect of his job
experiences as a high school principal.

Principal 5 addressed teacher apathy as a frustration. While he admits it is less of
a problem with the new teacher tenure laws in Michigan, there are times when he is
frustrated by the staff member that gives less than their full effort. This principal feels
that with the new evaluation system being implemented as part of tenure law reform, the
few lower-performing teachers on his staff will be forced to step up and do what is asked
of them.

Principal 9 stated that the area he’s least satisfied with is getting some staff to see
that they really do need to change. Since this principal works in a high-performing
school, there is less of a sense of urgency to change or teach differently, which is
frustrating for this principal.

Some of the aforementioned teacher issues can be attributed to the fact that the
principal must be the “bearer of bad news” as the authority in the building. One principal
mentioned that the unrealistic expectations put on them by teachers and parents can be
wearing. Principal 11 talked about times when a teacher might be having an issue with a
student or parent, and cannot get the problem resolved. In Principal 11’s estimation, the
teacher doesn’t want to deal with the conflict and would prefer that the problem be fixed
by the principal.

Sub-theme 4.2: Negative parent behavior. One category of negative adult
behaviors described by principals was the behavior of parents. Six of the principals
specifically mentioned parent problems as a factor that makes their job less enjoyable. This includes parents with misplaced priorities, negative attitudes toward school, and those who enable their students.

Principal 9 told a story about how during one of his parent meetings, several parents complained about the hiring of a specific football coach, yet had nothing to say about the hiring of some teachers or the academic aspect of the school. The principal was upset when he felt a lack of trust from the parents. Principal 9 lamented, “Sometimes parents don’t trust that you really are looking out for the best interests of your kids. Really? You really think I’m going to make a decision where I feel I’m not doing what’s in the best interest of kids?” He also gave an example where a student had been caught and confessed to stealing, yet the parents did not believe the principal. Instead, the parents continued to believe their student was incapable of the reported transgression.

Principal 7 noted that he did not like dealing with irate parents and Principal 3 also said angry parents also frustrate him. Principal 4 talked about frequent dealings with unreasonable parents, including a recent student expulsion was a part of the job he didn’t enjoy.

Enabling parents were another issue of common frustration. Principal 6 reported, “That defend and deny parent drives me nuts. We call them D & D parents. You know, helicopter, bulldozer, call them whatever you want. It’s the parent that just does everything for their kid.” Principal 11 does not care for parents who get upset when school staff members try to push the student out of their comfort zone,

To do what’s best for their kid because there are so many enabling parents and helicopter parents and to try to get them to understand that it’s okay for your kid
to struggle a little bit and to work through this and take ownership because they’ll be better off in the long run than trying to solve every problem.

Principal 11 also spoke about the mentality of parents,

Parents that just feel like they can intimidate and can get what they want and they’ll stop at nothing. Nothing. And it’s just sad, it’s a sad state, so just trying to manage all of those types of things, too. You get caught up in all those family dynamics and the dysfunction that the family has.

**Theme 5: Bureaucracy and Mandates**

A fifth theme related to research question two that detracts from job satisfaction are bureaucracy and mandates. Eleven of the 12 participants discussed ideas in this category. I will first reveal the aspects of bureaucracy and mandates that came out of the interviews and then discuss four related sub-themes. The four sub-themes include continual pace of change, paperwork, lack of control, and politics.

When asked what frustrates you about your job, Principal 2 said,

Anytime I get an envelope or an email from the MDE (Michigan Department of Education). I remember once saying, you know it’s a good day when my name isn’t above the urinal and my name’s not printed in the paper. Now a good day is, I don’t get an email from MDE.

Principal 8 echoed this sentiment saying, “Some of the logistical pieces; I guess would be the least exciting for me. Kids have never been that way, but sometimes, you know, I guess timelines, state mandates.” Principal 11 adds,

I just feel like you’re fighting the man all the time in terms of, you’re not doing it well enough, or we’re too driven by data. I don’t feel like everything I do can be
measured on a standardized test. I do believe in them to a degree but they’re one indicator.

On a related note, when asked about characteristics that make the job not enjoyable, Principal 9 replied,

Budget restraints. I think that probably, just any type of restraint that you get imposed on you when you’re trying to reform or do something new. I wouldn’t say the superintendent and assistant superintendents are the ones putting the constraints on us, but all of the budget and the bureaucracy of trying to get things done.

When Principal 6 was asked about characteristics that make the job not enjoyable, he said, “That’s an obvious one; just all of the red tape, all of the state guidelines, all of the changes.”

**Sub-theme 5.1: Continual pace of change.** While a number of principals mentioned change as an exciting and enjoyable part of being a high school principal, there were five principals that stated that the constant state of change present in education were detractors from their job satisfaction. Principal 6 said, “It’s just so frustrating to keep staff morale high, when they’re faced with negative publicity, changing demographics of your students, changing rules.” Principal 3 said something similar, “That’s very frustrating to me. I would just like to have some status quo kind of things, but nope. You know there’s so many things changing, plus the state dictates so much of what you can have.” Principal 10 adds, “If we just had the time to slow down and focus on a few things. We’ve got so many things juggling right now because of mandates or because of policy, because of, everything is just moving.”
Principal 10, when asked about specifics, said,

Moving targets. Everything is just constantly moving. Interpretations, mandates; if we could just, you know, slow things down, focus on what we in our community think is important, you know, seeing the big picture, knowing what our kids need to be prepared.

Principal 5 testified, “I’m concerned about my staff. We’re asking them to do so many things on top of, constantly changing the curriculum, and common core looming out in front of us.”

Principal 4 may have pinpointed the dichotomy accurately when asked what makes the job not enjoyable. He said,

Just like what makes it enjoyable and fun, the changing, the stuff that always, the stuff that makes it unenjoyable too. Keeping up with all the different curricular changes and legislation, right now all the new evaluation stuff. That makes it interesting but it also makes it challenging at the same time and sometimes you wish that it would stay the same for just a little bit. I think that’s a double-edged sword there that, there’s good and bad with that.

**Sub-theme 5.2: Paperwork.** A second sub-theme related to the main theme of bureaucracy and mandates that some principals did not enjoy was paperwork. Six principals stated that the amount of paperwork has increased over the last several years and is aggravating to deal with. Principals mentioned that emails and electronic versions of “paperwork” have added to this burden. Principal 4 said,

I’m an early bird so I do most of my paperwork but I wish I could get somebody to do some of those paperwork things and those mundane things. Sometimes you
just have to stay in your office during the day, to answer some important emails or whatever, but, just those type of things that aren’t really that important but need to be done.

Principal 5 had similar sentiments when referring to something that he doesn’t like, “I guess the things that are most difficult are the mundane kinds of things.”

Principal 9 replied, “150 emails per day. Being tied sometimes to the office and not being able to be out in the hallways or the classrooms where you really want to be.”

Principal 5 said, “You know there’s not a lot I don’t like day to day. I guess right now it’s trying to fit all the evaluations that I have and all the, it’s not paperwork now, but it’s electronic paperwork.” Principal 12 said, “Sometimes we get caught in here (referring to the office). The bell rings you remember, Oh, I got to get in the hall, you’re busy working on AdvancEd reports and those kinds of things that are nonsensical in the daily operations.”

**Sub-theme 5.3: Lack of control.** A third sub-theme related to bureaucracy and mandates is a lack of control. Two principals specifically talked about a lack of control in their position. Principal 2 when referring to legislators, “They think they know about what we do and they really don’t. So that’s frustrating when people dictate and mandate when they really don’t fully understand the impacts of decisions. That’s what frustrates me.” Principal 10 also talked about things out of his control,

You can’t fix everything. That was another tough lesson for me in this location, where I can’t, I can’t fix everything. I can’t fix situations that our kids are in all the time, I can’t fix budgets, I can’t fix master schedules all the time. I don’t have,
sometimes you don’t have the control that you think you have and that’s a tough one to get used to.”

**Sub-theme 5.4: Politics.** Politics was a fourth and final sub-theme having to do with bureaucracy and mandates. Five principals mentioned this as something they disliked about their job. Principal 11 mentioned he didn’t like, “the government mentality of just bashing schools and we’re not doing enough.” He went on further to talk about the punitive attitude toward schools,

So from a legislative side, we just get hammered, and continue to get hammered; I understand that we need to improve, I totally get that. But yet we have a raw material coming to us that we can’t reject so we have to take your tired, your weak, your poor, your hungry, your homeless, and I’m okay with that but we have to give, build in some ways; let’s reward students or schools for success, not punish, not this hammer approach.

Principal 4 talked about politics in a different sense:

The whole board politics and the whole community politics and, and they shouldn’t be that big of a deal and they are. I mean I guess that really bothers me, when you see good people affected by those types of things, that really bothers me.

Referring to the high school principal position, he said,

It’s become such a social position right now and what I mean by that, your decisions are, are as a high school principal, have gotten bigger and bigger and bigger but yet they’re magnified more now with social media and everything. It’s just different, it’s different in education, you’ll have a parent and first thing they
say you know I’m bringing this to the school board if you don’t do this, this, and this.

Principal 4 summarized his dislikes: “I’m not a very political guy I guess, you know, community and board politics, I guess you could say.”

Principal 7 shared, “I don’t care for being involved in the political side of things, and the policy side of things. I don’t care for the direction that we’re going.” He also added some thoughts about local politics,

I don’t care for what I feel like at times is a game with central office. And I don’t mean all of central office. But I think the high school position is tremendously unique in the fact that I think it’s kind considered the jewel in the crown. I think it gets the most attention, no matter whether you like it that way or not.

Principal 8 said,

All the hoops and barriers and hurdles that you have to jump with the way things are changing now, the accountability, those kinds of things, and I don’t think they’re bad. I just, I always feel that if you allow a legislative body, the Senate, the House, to make decisions for education, you’re almost always going to be in trouble.

Finally, Principal 2 stated, “It’ll be interesting because it’s an election year, we’ll see promises are made and then we’ll see what’s kept. But that’s probably what’s most frustrating for me.”

**Theme 6: Lack of Support/Trust**

A sixth theme identified in the study was the lack of support and trust exhibited toward the high school principal and the principal position. This theme emerged from
four principals when they deliberated on the unsatisfying aspects of the job. The participant’s thoughts with regard to the lack of support and trust will now be discussed.

When asked what characteristics make the job not enjoyable, Principal 5 said,

I would say my experience is this. A superintendent that doesn’t support you. A board that meddles and doesn’t understand they have two roles and that’s to hire and fire the superintendent and set policy. And the helicopter parent. And we’ve had 3 superintendents while I’ve been here.

Principal 6 after talking about a less than stellar relationship with his superintendent said,

And again that’s what being attacked right now is I’m starting to lose some autonomy from next door and I don’t like that. I made a decision that’s been overturned and I can’t remember the last time I made a decision, and it was, it had to do with a student needing a [ ].

Principal 6 continued, “So that’s very, very frustrating, new demands, new leadership, and a leadership that doesn’t, doesn’t understand what we’ve had here.”

When asked why people leave the position, Principal 11 stated,

I would say lack of support. Lack of support. I think it’s the same with teachers; you have to have central office staff that supports you and are in tune with what you’re trying to do to weather some of those storms.

He adds,

If you have an issue with your superintendent and they’re trying to do something and you philosophically disagree, you know. And I’ve seen a lot of administrators get themselves just, if you’re fighting city hall buddy you’re, it’s horrible.
Because you really, if you don’t have that cohort to really work with, you, it’s lonely and it’s a painful job.

Principal 12 reflected on a time when the job was not enjoyable,

Well, I finally got it enjoyable, I’ll have to think back. Inconsistency in the board of education. Relationship with the EA and the board of education and the superintendent. I think those two; lack of trust amongst them created such a negative environment that no one was happy.

**Theme 7: Time Commitment**

A fourth and final theme associated with research question two, and having to do with job dissatisfaction, on the part of high school principals was the time commitment required of principals. Half of the principals specifically stated that the time commitment required to do the job when asked for detractors to job satisfaction. Principal 1 asserted,

I would say as I get up here in age, I don’t always enjoy coming back for a late night event, especially in the winter… so I would say, maybe all the evening and weekend events would be one of the things that… I would like to pick and choose a little.

Principal 2 talked about his position compared to an elementary principal in terms of evening commitments, “He has PTO once a month, doesn’t have sports, and he puts in a hard day, he’s a hard worker, but he doesn’t have the commitments at night. I have 15 commitments, easily a month, at night. Every month.” He goes on, “The workload on a high school principal today, and the pressures that are put on a high school principal are much greater than they were before.”
Principal 7 compared the time commitment of the high school principal position to other administrative jobs in his district,

I think it’s the most difficult job in the system. I’ve had a superintendent tell me that. I think it’s the job that is most challenging on a variety of fronts. I think sometimes when I think about compensation or my colleagues and what they’re making and what I’m making; why would I do this when I could go there and have one night every two weeks as opposed to four nights a week.

Principal 10 also talked about the time commitment as a detractor from his job satisfaction,

Honestly, I do think it’s the schedule. Sometimes it can be relentless. You have to be visible. There are so many events that go on in the community but there are more people coming to high school events than any other event in most communities. I mean it, you know, the schedule, you know whether it’s the night schedule or the day to day schedule and I’ll be honest with you that’s why I’m having such a hard time with this, keeping up with the evaluations.

Principal 11 talked about the time commitment and what it means to family life, “There’s a cost because my family’s; my family’s had a cost. I’m a three to four to five night a week at school guy. There’s a cost to my family.” He goes on,

It’s an incredibly rewarding job but it’s a challenge and you really have to look at the balance in your life and your passion and are you willing to do the things you need to do to be successful. But there is a cost.

Finally, Principal 3 added when asked for specific detractors to job satisfaction,
Just be ready for the hours. Just be ready for the hours, because I’m telling ya, it’s you know, 15 every day. If you’ve got a young family you’re raising, there’s a time commitment there and you’ve got to have one heck of an understanding spouse.

**Themes Related to Research Question Three**

**Theme 8: Factors Influencing Longevity**

The third research question, “How do principals explain their longevity in the job—what are the factors that contribute to their longevity and what are the factors, if any, that detract or threaten their longevity?” will be addressed in this next section. Many views were discussed by principals and the sub-themes that came out of the study will be outlined in the pages that follow.

The sub-themes that contribute to the participant’s longevity include taking a slow career path, working in an environment that has a good culture and fit, and having support for the job by central office, staff, community, and colleagues. There were also self-described personal qualities which include having a balance in their life, competitiveness, being persistent, and have a positive outlook on life.

**Sub-theme 8.1: Slow career path.** When asked to identify what contributed to their longevity, one-third of the principals specifically referenced taking a slow career path. They noted a methodical rise up the career ladder from teaching to administration that gave them a foundation for the principalship. Principal 9 affirms this,

I really, never was in a rush to leave the job I was in, so I’ve loved them all. I think the reason I’ve gotten the jobs that I have gotten is that I wasn’t in a rush to ever leave the job I was in.
Principal 5 talked about spending time at each level,
I was a teacher for 12 years, I was an athletic director for 12 years, I was an assistant principal for 6 years and now I’m a principal. And so I’ve never jumped into anything that might put me over my head and I think sometimes young teachers want to teach three years and get out and I don’t think that’s the right thing to do.

He adds,

Probably from my position, as I look out to why I have lasted as long as I have in education, it’s because I never did anything too fast. I just think you got to have the experiences. I truly think that’s important. It’s the experiences and not rushing into it that quick.

Principal 7 alluded to this as well, “I think a lot of it is having people ready and prepared with a support system built around them to be successful.” He talked about how spending time at different levels provided experiences that ultimately helped him handle the principal position.

Principal 4 also talked about his pre-principal experiences in a positive manner, “I’ve had some pretty good experiences in my career. I don’t think I could have done this job without a good teaching experience and coaching, and then being an assistant principal and A.D.”

**Sub-theme 8.2: Fit and culture of the organization.** Many of the principals referenced the enormous amount of support from various entities that contribute to their job satisfaction and their longevity. Specifically, a third of the principals conversed about the perceived good fit for them as the individual occupying the principal position.
Principal 4 said, “Right now, I’m very comfortable in this position and I don’t plan on going anywhere; you don’t see that too much anymore.” He goes on, “I’ve been in the same community for a long time.” When asked about what he’d tell others about longevity he adds, “I would say make sure it’s the right community, the right school for you, that you’re the right fit for the position because you might fit the position, but the position might not fit you and vice versa.”

Principal 11 talked about the culture and how organizational culture contributes to his longevity, “I’ve considered moving to other districts, I’ve considered maybe applying elsewhere and trying something new. I think you just develop that culture where it’s good and we’ve got a good balance.” He went on to talk about how he wouldn’t move because of the culture he’s developed and the resulting longevity. Principal 12 had an interesting take about what made his job enjoyable. He said,

Number one, longevity. You have to be there long enough to establish the culture.

I think that is a key. Life’s much more enjoyable when you get the environment, the culture to the liking of your colleagues, as well as yourself.

When discussing organizational culture and fit, principals frequently mentioned the support they received as contributing to their longevity. The following sections will address that support among the various entities and look at its relationship to longevity.

**Sub-theme 8.3: School board, superintendent and central office support.**

When asked specifically about how those above the principal rank can affect the longevity of a principal, four of them spoke about this type of support. Principal 7 talked about the support of his superintendent. He is involved in some work at the “blank” level for an organization and said,
For me, participation in our state association, with leadership, and doing things at the state and national level are important. My superintendent lets me go to “blank” every other month to work on a project for four or five days. You must have a support network of people above you in central office, who appreciate the challenges and the job you have to do as the high school principal.

When asked what he likes about coming to work, Principal 11 said,

The people. We have a great young, an awesome superintendent. I was fortunate to work with the last superintendent who retired and they really give you a sense of belonging, but it’s also a sense of appreciation and you just feel that value.

He summed it up by saying, “I mean I’ve had great superintendents.”

Principal 6 talked about working with two different superintendents, one of which contributed to his satisfaction and longevity and one that did not. “Blank” and I had a very solid relationship,” as he referred to one superintendent. “I respected him. The first thing he did when hired was pick my brain for two weeks.” He continued, “Again I go back to relationships. And building strong relationships will all different levels of your organization. You’ve got to have a strong relationship with your board. And the last ‘blank’ years, that’s been trying at times.” He went on to talk about how he felt like he could continue his work as a principal in that district under one last superintendent but with a different superintendent, he felt like he might need to be looking for a new position in the future.

Principal 5 responded as follows when asked about staying in the position,

I think one of the biggest things is who’s in the leadership position above you. I’ve been very fortunate to be under two exceptional superintendents. Both of
them very different leadership styles but both of them very effective, both of
them, good teachers themselves; let you make mistakes but also teach you when
needed. I think that’s one of the biggest things.

He continued to his thoughts with regard to the school board, “There’s not been a lot of
transition on our school board, I think that’s important.”

**Sub-theme 8.4: Community support.** When talking about longevity, two-thirds
of the principals mentioned the community support as a factor as to why they have
remained in their respective positions. When asked what has kept him in the position for
over six years, Principal 10 stated,

I’d say the community. It’s a great place for me right now. I’ve asked do I want to
be a high school principal forever? Do I have aspirations for central office or
something different? I have to battle that and I’m comfortable where I am; I love
the community. I think it’s a combination of I’m satisfied but I’m also satisfied
where my family is right now.

He also said, “I’ve felt I’ve had tremendous parental and community support in
everything that we’ve done. I definitely feel supported here in ‘blank.’ This particular
principal works in a high performing district and he expressed, “There is a certain
expectation that we’re going to do things the right way all the time, which can be a little
bit of a burden but you know there’s a lot of satisfaction with that.”

Principal 1 said, “We have a community that not only embraces quality, but kind
of demands quality.” He talked about parents sending their students to his school with
high expectations, and their appreciation of what the school does. He identifies this
dynamic as it contributes to his willingness and ability to stay in the position. Principal 11
also talked about the community within which he works, “It’s really the people and the kids; I mean we’re fortunate, we have a really nice community.”

Principal 7 said,

“Blank’s” been real good to me. And it’s been a place where I have been able to grow professionally. It’s been a place that I’ve given a lot to, but they’ve also given a lot to me. And for me, allegiance and loyalty is a big piece of things as well.

Later he talked about why he stays at his high school, “I feel like I’ve really had a hand, I’ve been a participant in really building something that is very positive and very good. And there’s a piece of me that doesn’t want to leave that.”

Principal 3 talked at length about the community and support he receives.

I don’t know why I’d want to go anywhere else. You know, we’ve got great community here. We have good kids here. But there again, I think it’s because we have such a positive culture and our, our community believes in our high school.

He went on to talk about the school’s motto and how he feels his personality fits the motto very well. He also said,

I’m impressed with what I’m seeing and I think it’s the community, I think it’s the school board and do we have problems? Of course we do. But as a whole, I think we’re really family-oriented and our parents value education.

Finally, he stated, “I don’t think you can get it any better.”

Principal 6 talked about how the relationships built in the community influences his longevity. “Relationships with the families. I’ve been around so long. I go to church in the community. I buy my groceries in the community. I have breakfast in the
community. And that relationship has been built over time.” He goes on, “I feel a tremendous responsibility of delivering the best high school experiences for the kids of this community. So it’s a community feel.” He talked about how he feels appreciated by the community, “I put my head on the pillow every night and I feel as if I’ve had a fulfilling career that people appreciate, and when you feel appreciated, you’re willing to give everything that you have.”

Principal 4 also talked about the community as it relates to longevity,
It’s somewhere where I want to raise my kids and want my kids to go to school. If I can continue to say that then, it’s somewhere that I want to be a principal, so I think that’s so important that it’s a great community.

Principal 9 talked at length about the community within which he works and the culture.
It’s just an incredible place to be. I mean we specifically moved our kids into the district this year because I want them to be in this building because of what I think this building does for kids. I could see myself retiring right here.

When asked why he has stayed in this particular position for this length of time he replied, “It’s just an incredible building. The staff, the students, the community. It’s hard to explain.”

**Sub-theme 8.5: Staff and collegial support.** Principals were asked why they have stayed in their current position. Four of the principals talked directly about the staff they have assembled and the working conditions that have been created. In fact, six of the principals had hired over two-thirds of their teaching staff. Because they had been
instrumental in building the staff they noted a heightened loyalty of staff which produces better collaboration and teamwork.

Principal 4 stated, “I have talked a little bit about timing. Right now, very honestly, we’re at a very good point in our high school. I think we have a good main office team here; good teaching staff.” He elaborated and referred to why he has continued to stay in his position,

If you’re with a good team, I think is another important thing. You know, I’ve been on some stronger teams and maybe some weaker teams but really when you’re on a good team and things are kind of clicking, that’s a very positive part of it, so I guess that would be colleagues and teamwork and that type of thing.

Those are a couple of the reasons why.

Principal 11 had some similar thoughts, “I’ve been fortunate to work with really good people. I’m going to go back to the whole team concept.” He talked about assistant principals and staff who had made his job more enjoyable, which he credits with increasing his longevity. He went on, “You have to have teachers that in general consensus support you and what you’re doing. And if you don’t have because you’re on an island on this deal; you’re in deep trouble.” Principal 5 simply stated, “I have a good staff,” when talking about why he has been able to find success and longevity in his position. Principal 2 reflected on the time earlier in his principal career when staff and collegial support played an integral role in helping him in his position, “When I was the youngest administrator, I had great experience around me, on our team. They were very supportive which I think was huge.”
Sub-theme 8.6: Balance in professional and personal life. When discussing the concept of longevity of the principal position, four principals specifically mentioned how the balance they keep in their personal life enables them to stay in the position. When asked about the key reason he persisted in the position, Principal 10 said,

It’s a great question. I think I’ve found, for right now, I’ve found a healthy balance. What I have to do professionally, what I need to do professionally, and then also balancing the personal aspect of who I am. I tell people all the time I am a high school principal but that’s the third most important thing I do every day.

You know, I’m a father and I’m a husband.

Principal 4 shared, “Keeping the balance is important.” He was referring to his professional and personal life. “I get a little bit, I don’t know if wiser is the word. I mean I’ve only been doing this six years as a principal but you get, with more experience, you’re able to hang on in a principalship.”

Principal 9 elaborated further, “I would say because I am a family person, and believe that it’s important to spend time with my family so I push the staff to the do the same.” Principal 9 feels this helps build morale and a community in his building and enabled him to find success and longevity. He said,

I’ll kick my counselors out of the building. I’ll kick my secretaries out of the building. I try to get out of the building by 4:00, 4:30 every day to go at least spend some time with my daughters and have dinner with them and then if I have to come back, I come back, which I generally have to come back a lot. And, so I think setting that tone for the entire staff helps, and I think it creates a family feeling in this building.
Principal 10 not only talked about finding a healthy balance with professional life and personal life, then explained advice he would give a new principal, “Make sure you set aside, make sure you can leave at the end of the day, make sure you can enjoy your family, make sure you can find time for yourself; this job can consume you.” He gave some examples of how he accomplishes this and stated,

I think we’re in a good place as a family. I’m professionally satisfied right now and I think we’re in a good place as a family. And I would think the family is certainly going to outweigh, you know, any aspirations that I might have at this particular moment.

Principal 7 talked about balance in terms of having other interests and ways to grow professionally, “For me I’ve always been able to dangle my feet in other activities, and ventures, and opportunities which have kind of kept me whole and kept me fresh.” Each of the principals was noting the need for rich experiences outside of being a high school principal.

Sub-theme 8.7: Still growing professionally. Two principals identified that they felt they were still growing and able to accomplish things in their current situation and this fact had contributed to their longevity. Principal 5 said, “I’m still growing and I’m going to be a better principal today than I was yesterday. I think that part keeps me going.” He recounted with pride an event with a family he had worked with and he said, “The reaction from the parent; the parent said, that was really nice of you to call to make sure everything’s okay. I guess that keeps me going, too.” He went on to share that he informed his staff at a staff meeting that he was not retiring and he recounted, “I’m
staying five more years and I got a standing ovation. You know that part made me feel
good, that I’m still effective here. And we’re not done. Our work’s not done.”

Principal 11 talked about how his professional growth keeps him fresh and still
finding that he enjoys his job and plans to stay, “I love leadership and developing
leadership theory, motivational theory. The guys like Todd Whitaker. I just love that; I
eat up stuff like that.” Principal 11 attributed some of his longevity to the fact that he tries
to stay current on leadership and research, and that his staff welcomes and appreciates
that.

**Sub-theme 8.8: Persistent and competitive personality.** In terms of longevity
in the principal position, six principals talked about particular personality traits or
characteristics they described about themselves that they felt enabled them to persist as a
high school principal. Principal 6 reflected on the time he applied for a central office
position and didn’t get it but was able to remain as a principal in the same district, “You
didn’t want my style of leadership. Well, I’m still going to be who I am and I’m not
going to change. So my longevity is probably because of my bullheadedness. Stubborn.”

Principal 7 replied when asked what has allowed him to stay in the position for so
long, “A lot of resilience. You know, I think no matter what, I think I’m competitive. I
know I’m competitive. But at the same point, I’d say patient. But persistent.” Principal 4
had some of the same thoughts,

A little bit I think is also you have to have a little bit of it in you, too. You have to
have a toughness. There’s a toughness factor that I think you have to have that
some people just don’t have. Toughness and also the ability to have, let things roll
off your shoulders a little bit, which sometimes isn’t always easy.
Principal 11 said,

One quality is ego. Because you have to have a bit of an ego to do these jobs. And if you don’t have an ego, you’re going to get eaten alive. So, you have to balance that ego with and I’ve been humbled many times. Many times. And you have to listen to those around you.

He went on, “You know if you don’t kill me I won’t quit. I mean that’s the other part of it. You have to be able to, you have to be a warrior, you know and fight those battles.”

Principal 3 described himself and why he has been able to attain longevity, “I’m a fighter, strong-willed. Yeah, I guess I’d say that. I’m a fighter and strong-willed. You know simply that I’m having fun. I wouldn’t want to do anything else right now.”

Principal 9 went further when describing why he’s attained longevity,

I think the way I look at things. Generally, overall, I don’t look at things as a problem; I look at them as a challenge. I’m very competitive so if that challenge is in my way, I want to try to find a way to get around it.

Sub-theme 8.9: Positive nature. Talking about personality traits, three principals referenced what they see as the fact that they generally have a positive outlook which enables them to persist in the position. Principal 6 said,

I’m always a half-full kind of guy. If the glass is in front of me, everything’s going to be half-full and even when faced with challenges, I’m going to try to find the positive out of it and make it a learning experience.

He went on, “Take any situation, no matter how bad, no matter how blah it is, glass is half-full, turn it into something that we can do.”
Principals 5 and 7 gave specific examples of how they’ve turned something negative into positive. Principal 7 explained a situation that occurred where he worked with some parents who were upset about an issue. He said, “You know turning potential adversaries into advocates. And they leave saying, you know what? I was treated fairly.” Principal 5 had a similar thought when reflecting on taking tough situations and making them positive, “That’s driven me for years. To know that something little; it was a negative, really was a positive.”

**Sub-theme 8.10: Work ethic.** Another characteristic described by three of the principals in terms of their longevity was work ethic. Principal 2 talked about his work ethic and longevity,

There are people that know my car is in the lot before everybody’s. They also know that my car is one of the last to leave. They know that I attend all of the fine arts and as many athletic contests as possible both home and away. I’ve created somewhat of a monster along those lines.

He goes on, “I’ll go back to my work ethic. I’ve never had a sick day here in 22 years.” He continued, “And I look at this staff as a, an extension of who I am and if I’ve got people in the community saying that teacher sucks, I’ll explore that, and, I think that’s helped me in my longevity here.” His work ethic has led to his high visibility, which he believes has increased his credibility and longevity.

Principal 4 stated, “I’m kind of a grinder. I’m a hard worker. One of the biggest things; I’ll try to outwork anybody.” Principal 4 made these statements after being asked what has allowed him to stay in his position. He continued, “You know, getting the teachers what they need, the students what they need, but you know, I’m not afraid to
pick up a mop in the hallway, before I call a custodian so I guess those are some things.”

Principal 6 adds,

Lead by example. You can’t shortcut anything. You can’t cut corners, anywhere.

You have to be the first person in the building every day. You have to be the last one out every day. So that when teachers who are overworked and underpaid look at you, they say, oh he’s doing it, and that helps.

Chapter IV Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of high school principals and their job satisfaction and longevity. This chapter included a description of the 12 participants as well as descriptions of their thoughts and experiences. Several themes emerged as a result of the three research questions and those were revealed in this chapter.

There were three main themes that addressed research question one: what experiences in their work do high school principals describe as contributing to their job satisfaction? These themes were working with and influencing students, leading and managing change, and doing a challenging and important job. With these three main themes that address research question one, there were several sub-themes.

There were four main themes that emerged and addressed research question two: what experiences do principals describe as impeding or detracting from their job satisfaction? These were negative adult behaviors, bureaucracy and mandates, lack of support and trust, and time commitment. With these four, there were multiple sub-themes as well.
Research question three was, “How do principals explain their longevity in the job—what are the factors that contribute to their longevity and what are the factors, if any, that detract or threaten their longevity?” When the transcripts were analyzed, multiple concepts emerged. As a result, these findings were grouped into 10 sub-themes and presented at the end of this chapter.

Now let us turn our attention to Chapter V, where the conclusions are presented.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

In Chapter I, I introduced the research study and explained the importance of why such a study should be completed. Powerful ecological forces including societal, demographic, and economic factors are impacting schooling (Fusarelli, 2011). There is concern, however, that we may not have quality leaders in place or ready to assume leadership of our high schools. Principal turnover, on average, is detrimental to school performance (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). Engaging in school change requires principals to move from being managers of the status quo to facilitators of reform (Frederick, 1992). The goal of this study was to find out what principals identify as contributing to or detracting from their job satisfaction as well as elements that lead to longevity in the position.

Researchers generally characterize the principal as the linchpin for success in any school change initiative (Cuban, 2004; Fullan, 2001). Given that principals are an important factor in student achievement and leading change, I wanted to find what enables principals to attain longevity in their position and enjoy their job. The study was framed around three research questions.

1. What experiences in their work do high school principals describe as contributing to their job satisfaction?

2. What experiences do principals describe as impeding or detracting from their job satisfaction?
3. How do principals explain their longevity in the job—what are the factors that contribute to their longevity and what are the factors, if any, that detract or threaten their longevity?

In Chapter II, I delved into multiple areas that helped to frame the study. The importance of the position of the high school principalship was discussed along with how the principal is a key ingredient in restructuring education at the high school level (DiPailoa & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003). It was also revealed that the increasing burden on building principals with their responsibilities, the decrease in the candidate pool, and principal burnout are all factors that lead to the high school principalship being viewed as an undesirable position (Cushing et al., 2003; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Goodwin et al., 2003; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Hallinger, 1992; Howard & Mallory, 2008). Finally, longevity, job satisfaction, and research that supports that satisfied workers perform at higher levels were all explored in the literature review (Boris-Schacter & Merrifield, 2000; Conley et al., 2007; Earley & Weindling, 2007; Hargreaves et al., 2003; Judge, 2009).

This study is important because if principals are the key to improving a school, then understanding what contributes to or detracts from high school principal job satisfaction may enable schools to attract and retain effective leaders for our schools. If principals are continuing to find increasing burdens on their time and are experiencing burnout, then we risk losing leaders or the job less will be less attractive to potential leaders. Conversely, if we find what principals find enjoyable about their job, these findings can be used to provide ways to make the job attractive and desirable to others.
Chapter III provided an explanation of the research methodology. This was a qualitative study designed to find out what high school principals have experienced in their job in terms of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and longevity. Creswell (2003) describes qualitative research as emergent rather than tightly prefigured and this study was done in the phenomenological tradition. As I wanted to learn what high school principals have experienced in terms of job satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and longevity, a phenomenology was the optimal way to explore this. Moustakas (1994) stated that the focus of a phenomenology is on what the person experiences and therefore the goal of the study was to gather participant’s thoughts on their experiences in the high school principal’s position with regard to the stated research questions.

The method used to collect data was semi-structured interviews. Twelve principals participated in the study and they were suburban and rural principals from the western and northern regions of Michigan. Each of the participants had worked at least five years in their current position as high school principal. Interviews were conducted with principals and transcripts were created from the audio recorded interviews. Each participant had the opportunity to review and return the transcript after making any revisions.

The transcripts were read multiple times and relevant statements were sorted and clipped from the transcripts. The relevant statements included a unit of analysis. The unit of analysis was a concept, idea, or action that illuminated the significant features of the data to so that the questions could be answered (Foss & Waters, 2007). The units of analysis were sorted into themes and sub-themes as they related to the three research questions. The themes were organized and then described in Chapter IV.
The themes that came from the research were explored and discussed in Chapter IV. The themes included:

1. Working with and Influencing Students
2. Leading and Managing Change
3. Doing a Challenging and Important Job
4. Negative Adult Behaviors
5. Bureaucracy and Mandates
6. Lack of Support and Trust
7. Time Commitment
8. Factors Influencing Longevity

Each theme was explained in detail as it related to the research questions. The first three themes related to research question one; the next four themes related to research question two. Finally, in terms of research question three, the eighth theme is addressed as multiple sub-themes that were found to contribute to longevity.

**Overview of Major Findings**

In this section, the major findings from the study are described and compared to the previous research found in the literature. It should be noted that what was found in the literature regarding previous research on high school principal job satisfaction were quantitative studies. This qualitative study provided new insights and the focus was on what principals find satisfying about their job and how their experiences contribute to their longevity. There are also some new findings with regard to what principals experience as detracting from their job satisfaction that have not been present in prior quantitative studies.
The findings are organized according to the three research questions. The findings from my study that did not have any apparent connection to previous research are also explored. A summary of the findings described in this chapter can be found in Table 6.

Table 6

*Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mathis Insights</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals find satisfaction in their jobs when they are working with and influencing students.</td>
<td>No previous research found, thus Mathis provides new insights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals enjoy leading and managing change and working with staff.</td>
<td>White et al. (2011) found correlation between principal job satisfaction and ability to influence change. Conley et al. (2007) found interpersonal relationships with other school personnel was important in contributing to job satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals enjoy the challenging nature of the job and developing leaders</td>
<td>No previous research found as it relates to principal job satisfaction but developing leaders in the school leads to higher student achievement (Crum &amp; Sherman, 2008; Leithwood &amp; Maccall 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with difficult adults detracts from principal job satisfaction</td>
<td>No previous research found, thus Mathis provides new insights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased bureaucratic mandates, paperwork, and loss of local control detract from principal job satisfaction.</td>
<td>Eckman (2004) found job satisfaction is inversely related to role conflict. Thompson et al. (1997) in synthesis of findings found role conflict or role ambiguity inversely related to job satisfaction. White et al. (2011) found tension between how principals use their time and their perceptions of the value of their efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals find that the lack of trust on the part of parents and the public detracts from their job satisfaction.</td>
<td>No previous research found, thus Mathis provides new insights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals find the time commitment required of the job to contribute to job dissatisfaction.</td>
<td>Howard and Mallory (2008) found time demands of the position, as one of the factors contributing to job dissatisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longevity in the principal position is influenced by multiple factors.</td>
<td>Boris-Schacter and Merrifield (2000) found that principals who integrate all aspects of their life into principalship attained longevity. Hargreaves (2003) found that principals need sufficient time in the job to see their efforts through.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 1 Major Findings

What experiences in their work do principals describe as contributing to their job satisfaction? When conducting the interviews, the concept that emerged with every principal was that they all feel satisfied in their job when they are working with and influencing students. Teachers report that the reason for going into education is to serve others (DeLong, 1987). Challenge, altruism, and leadership influence are all factors that influence teachers to become administrators (Hancock, Black, & Bird, 2006). In my study, principals report that by working with students and serving them, it serves as a contributor to their job satisfaction.

In my study, all of the principals had been a teacher earlier in their career. Presumably if one goes into teaching to serve others and if a reason to pursue the principalship is to have leadership influence then this finding is not surprising. If Hancock et al. (2006) found that influence is a reason for pursuing the principalship, and having leadership influence on students and helping them find success are key findings in terms of principal job satisfaction, then it will be beneficial to use this information to attract and retain high school principals in the position.

For high school principals, working with and influencing students manifests itself in different ways. In my study, principals reported seeing student growth, student success, engaging in student interactions, and building relationships as all part of this equation. In a review of the literature, the concept of working with and influencing students was not present in other job satisfaction studies with principals.

A second finding with research question one was that principals enjoy leading and managing change and empowering others to assist them. The change process and the
principal as a key player in the change process has been touted in the conversation surrounding school reform (Cuban, 2004; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger, 1992; Marks & Printy, 2003; Waters et al., 2003; White-Smith & White, 2009). If principals enjoy leading change, and change and leadership are integral to school reform, then this is an important finding in describing the scope of the high school principal.

Principals in my study reported that they enjoy leading and managing change and that they find the constant change in today’s educational climate exciting and challenging. If the principal is a key player in school reform, then a principal who thrives in a changing environment and reports that as a satisfying aspect of their job may attain longevity. Principals in this study also elaborated on the fact that change is a constant in the field of education. Principals enjoy the challenge of building relationships with staff to influence them and assist them in accepting the constant changes. Principals see this as something that contributed to the enjoyment of their job.

The connection found between principals partiality for change and influencing other individuals to accept the need for change, may prove to be a good combination for the type of leader needed in today’s rapidly changing educational landscape. In the literature, White et al. (2011) found a correlation between principal job satisfaction and the ability to influence change. The difference here is that White et al. found this result from a study of K-12 principals, while my study focused on high school principals.

Conley et al. (2007) found that attachment to coworkers was an important variable to the job satisfaction of principals. In my study, principals reported enjoying their work with staff and some went so far as to say their staff is the reason they have
remained in their current position. This study confirms what Conley et al. purported. The principals in my study were all individuals who have been in their position for five years or more. Several of these principals felt that because of their collaboration with staff members and the positive relationship established to develop a collaborative environment with their staff, they have been able to not only find satisfaction and be effective in their job, but attain longevity. Being able to embrace and work with all of the recent changes in education along-side their staff has contributed to their job satisfaction.

A third finding related to research question one is that principals enjoy the challenging nature of the high school principal position and developing leaders to help them meet those challenges. It is interesting to find that while participants in this study reported finding satisfaction in developing leaders, other studies have found that when principals develop leaders in the school, it enhances student achievement (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

Principals find it satisfying to develop personnel and facilitate leadership amongst teachers. Prior research indicates that integrated leadership contributes to highly effective schools as well (Marks & Printy, 2003; Waters et al., 2003). My findings along with prior research indicate that there might be dual benefits of having high school principals develop leaders. It is a process that principals enjoy along with the fact that it contributes to high-achieving schools.

**Research Question 2 Major Findings**

What experiences do principals describe as impeding or detracting from their job satisfaction? In this study, principals identified multiple things that detract from their job satisfaction. As stated earlier, there are quantitative studies that have been conducted on
the topic but little qualitative work was found in the literature. In the research, however, inhibitor studies associated with the principalship considerably outnumber motivator studies (Bass, 2006).

A new finding from my study indicates that principals find working with negative adult behavior as a detractor from their job satisfaction. Principals enjoy working with their staffs and attribute some of their job satisfaction in working with adults in the school setting. However, experiencing and addressing negative adult behavior is something that detracts from their job satisfaction. The reported adult behavior includes both parents’ and teachers’ behavior as being problematic for principals. Additionally, to a lesser degree, working with other adults in central office that may not support a principal can be a detractor from job satisfaction as well.

Principals talked about parents with unrealistic expectations of them and their school as well as the apathetic parent that is uninvolved in their child’s education as both contributing to job dissatisfaction. Also in dealing with adult behaviors, principals do not enjoy working with teachers who sometimes have unrealistic expectations of their principal after they have improperly handled a situation with a student or parent. In either case, principals find that working with adults who “should know better” as detracting from their job satisfaction.

A second finding related to research question two, is the bureaucratic mandates, and subsequent loss of local control contribute to principals finding dissatisfaction in their job. This typifies what Eckman (2004) was describing as a result of her studies on job satisfaction and role conflict. Eckman takes this a step further in terms of role conflict with high school principals. Eckman studied both males and females looking for
differences in job satisfaction and did find job satisfaction was significantly and inversely related to role conflict for the both groups. Essentially, principals have an altruistic idea of how they want to perform their job in working with students, teachers, and families, yet role conflict is present in that there are increasing amounts of paperwork to complete and guidelines and rules to follow. This was evidenced in my study by several of the principals expressing concern over not being able to spend their time doing meaningful work with students and teachers because of emails, phone calls, and working to address state and federal mandates. The tug between the roles of being a building manager and an instructional leader present continued role conflict for principals, which ultimately affects their job satisfaction.

Thompson et al. (1997), in their synthesis of findings on job satisfaction, found that as administrators experience increases in role ambiguity or role conflict, they report marked decreases in overall job satisfaction. This coincides with the findings of my study in that principals find role conflict present in a variety of instances. There are multiple situations where role conflict is present in a principal’s work.

Principals in my study cited examples when dealing with competing interests on a particular issue and there is role conflict or role ambiguity. Managing federal and state mandates and associated paperwork conflicts with their role as an instructional leader. Principals report that they want and need to be a change agent to improve teaching and learning in their schools, yet find the expectations of them to be at several high school and community events as taking up their time.

The perceived loss of local control as a result of the politicized nature of education creates a role conflict for principals. They report building relationships as a
necessary and enjoyable aspect of their job and wish to use these skills as a catalyst to create meaningful change. Continued legislative control of education, however, presents a role conflict in that they feel like this loss of local control dictates what they are to do as an educational leader.

Another new finding with research question two is that there appears to be a diminished lack of trust of principals on the part of parents. The political nature of public pressures in Michigan with recent expanded school choice legislation has led to an increased expectation on the part of parents for the school to deliver what they want for their student. Parents have more choices for their student’s schooling than previous generations. Michigan’s school choice policies create financial pressures not on schools that are performing most poorly but rather on those that face the most difficult educational challenges (Ni & Arsen, 2011). When a parent perceives that their expectations are not met, the perception that they have other choices for schooling can affect the principal–parent relationship. The findings of this study show that principals find this lack of trust and sometimes resulting political nature of schools to detract from their job satisfaction.

Principals may no longer enjoy the benefits of public confidence in them and their position as a result of the erosion of public confidence in public schools in general. It could be argued that educators are not held in as high esteem as they once were with the repeated media reports of failing or struggling schools.

A final finding related to research question two is a concept that may keep people from pursuing the principalship in the first place: the time commitment required to do the job. This finding is consistent with what Howard and Mallory (2008) reported. The time
demands of the position, along with a level of perceived lack of support from central office, were found to contribute to principal job dissatisfaction. The principals in this study acknowledged that the time required to do the job is a big commitment. All of the principals stated that this was a factor that either was a detractor to their job satisfaction or could potentially be a detractor if they let the job consume them.

**Research Question 3 Major Findings**

How do principals explain their longevity in the job—what are the factors that contribute to their longevity and what are the factors, if any, that detract or threaten their longevity? When principals were interviewed, many of their thoughts addressed questions related to both job satisfaction and longevity. Seemingly, if principals characterized something as satisfying in their job, they would also expand their thoughts to include that concept as contributing to their longevity. If principals talked about something as a not satisfying in their job, they might also expand their thoughts to include that concept as potentially detracting from their longevity.

Each of the principals that participated in the study had been in his position for at least five years. This was the standard used to determine participants for the study, so perhaps their longevity of five years or more was something they attained because they experienced satisfaction in their current position. While it is not proven, there were few comments made by participants about not achieving longevity as a result. The few comments that were made were suppositions made by principals who thought about reasons that may contribute to somebody else not staying in the position. In other words, these principals didn’t offer any personal experiences on factors that would detract or
threaten their longevity. As a result, this discussion will focus on those factors that contribute to high school principal longevity.

Several ideas were shared by principals in the study as to what contributed to their longevity. The concepts discussed by principals in my study are similar to the research results noted by Boris-Schacter and Merrifield (2000). They found that principals who find meaning in their work and stay committed to their work do not appear to sacrifice or shut off their real lives when they enter the school house door (p. 89). Boris-Schacter and Merrifield go on to say that because principals in their study seamlessly integrated professional and personal life and were less drained emotionally, they had more time and energy to reflect on practice.

This is congruent with some of the findings with my study. Finding balance in professional and personal life was noted by principals as a contributor to their longevity in their current position. These principals also mentioned that because they are still growing professionally and working to learn new things every day, it keeps them fresh and engaged with the people that they lead.

Hargreaves et al. (2003) suggest that where principals are achieving results, their tenure needs to be long enough to embed their improvements and they suggest at least five years. Several of the principals thought that because they were resilient and were able to be a part of a good culture that was present in the organization within which they work, they have been able to attain longevity. It may be difficult to ascertain which factor causes what. Was the principal able to establish an excellent culture in their building because of the support of the staff, community, school board, and superintendent? Or, did the principal earn the respect of the staff, community, school board, and superintendent?
first and then attain longevity after establishing a good culture? While it is not possible at this point to determine which came first or if one causes the other, the fact remains that principals in this study feel that the fit of their leadership style and culture of the organization contribute to their longevity in the position. In other words, they are a good match for the position they are currently in.

Several of the principals talked at length about the support of the community, their teaching staff, the school board, and the superintendent. Without this support, they would not find satisfaction in their job nor would they have attained the longevity they have in their position. It stands to reason then high school principals who understand the community within which they work and have leadership above them that value and support them, will find satisfaction in their job and have longevity.

The major findings of my study have been revealed according to the three research questions. Next, the findings as related to the conceptual framework will be presented.

**Study Findings in the Context of Conceptual Framework**

In Chapter I, a conceptual framework was presented that included the work of two groups of researchers. Glisson and Durick (1988) asserted that job satisfaction is comprised of two main concepts, which include (a) characteristics of job tasks, and (b) organizational characteristics. Quarstein et al. (1992) proposed that situational characteristics, which are relatively stable, and situational occurrences, which are transitory, contribute to an individual’s job satisfaction. Tying these two works together provide a lens through which the findings of this study can be viewed.
When examining the findings of this study and using the theoretical lens to view these findings, a slightly altered conceptual framework results. This is depicted in Figure 2. As one can see from the display, the four major boxes that remain from the original framework are organized on two different sides of the diagram. On the left are the concepts that contribute to overall high school principal’s job satisfaction. Quarstein et al.’s (1992) situational characteristics and Glisson and Durick’s (1988) characteristics of the organization are included on this side of the diagram.

![Figure 2. Toward a conceptual framework for job satisfaction for suburban and rural high school principals.](image)

On the right side of the diagram are the concepts that detract from the overall job satisfaction of high school principals. This includes Glisson and Durick’s (1988)
characteristics of job tasks and Quarstein et al.’s (1992) situational occurrences. One must be reminded that this framework is from a study involving only a limited number of suburban and rural principals. Further study would need to occur with a larger sample size and one that includes a more diverse sampling of high school principals.

Glisson and Durick (1988) proposed that the broader organizational or situational context of work is a major source of variation in the attitudes of workers in human service organizations. They also contend that if the organizational characteristics are positive for a worker, then it leads to increased worker commitment which leads to overall job satisfaction. The principals in this study were all complimentary of their environment within which they work. All of the principals worked in suburban or rural areas and reported positive things about their environment, the organization, community, and the people the work with. Principals felt that the positive organizational or situational context within which they work contributed to their longevity.

The second factor that contributes to job satisfaction according to Glisson and Durick (1988) are the characteristics of job tasks. Principals discussed several of their job tasks as it related to their satisfaction. Some of the tasks they reportedly enjoyed while others they did not. When using Glisson and Durick’s work as a lens to view high school principal job satisfaction, the findings point to the fact that in this particular study, the characteristics of job tasks contributed to principal job dissatisfaction more so than the organizational characteristics.

Glisson and Durick’s (1988) assertion that overall job satisfaction is a result of how an employee feels about their job has to do with both aspects: organizational characteristics and characteristics of job tasks. Generally many, but not all, things that
principals found dissatisfying about their job could be attributed the characteristics of job
tasks category in Glisson and Durick’s work.

One can see then that both the organization and community within the principal
works as well as the actual tasks of a high school principal both contribute to a level of
job satisfaction and ultimately their potential longevity. Most of these principals find the
organizational characteristics present in their current situation as positive and thus would
lead to greater worker commitment which ultimately contributes to overall job
satisfaction.

The other part of the lens from the conceptual framework is from the work of
Quarstein et al. (1992). These authors contend that there are two concepts—(a) situational
characteristics, and (b) situational occurrences—that elicit employee reactions and
subsequently lead to overall job satisfaction. While Quarstein et al.’s theory came out of a
study that involved working college students and there are several differences between
studying working college students and high school principals, the concepts they purport
do provide some insight nonetheless.

Situational characteristics are stable or permanent aspects of a work environment
and examples include pay, working conditions, or promotional opportunities. Many of the
principals in my study seemed satisfied with the situational characteristics of their
position. This is concluded from what principals did not say in the interviews. When
interviewed, principals did not report these types of things as contributing to job
dissatisfaction or detracting from their longevity.

Situational occurrences are transitory in nature. In and of themselves these events
are not life-changing but over time they can build up and affect the satisfaction of an
employee. Generally, the things that principals reported as detracting from their job satisfaction were things that would fall into this category. Examples of this include dealing with negative adult behavior, excessive paperwork, lack of local control, and the increased political environment within which schools exist.

In terms of comparing this new conceptual framework with the original depiction in Chapter I, it should be noted that some of the constructs like worker commitment, characteristics of the worker, or employee reactions disappear. There were limited data gathered from the study participants in these areas. Therefore, they do not appear in the proposed revised version of the framework.

For future research, the new proposed framework could be a starting point when studying high school principal job satisfaction. If we have some of this background knowledge and speculate as to what they find satisfying or dissatisfying about their job, a survey instrument could be developed. More research could be done in a qualitative tradition as well.

**Limitations**

As a result of purposive and snowball sampling, my study was limited to 12 high school principals in a specific geographic region in the state of Michigan. This type of sampling procedure decreased the generalizability of the findings. In order to find participants for the study, I started with principals that I thought had at least five years in their current position.

Another limitation of the study is that all of the principals were working in a suburban or rural setting. As such, the results of this study are not generalizable to all high school principals. When making contacts with principals in the western and northern
regions of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula, there were no individuals that were available to interview that worked in an urban setting and had at least five years in the principal position.

School leadership and the study of building principals is something that should continue to be examined. If principals are an important factor in leading our schools, then the study of their work environment and job satisfaction are critical to the adaptation of schools to serving the needs of society.

**Recommendations for Educational Leaders**

The changing landscape of education will continue to provide challenges to teachers and principals of public schools. As established in the review of the literature and as a result of the experiences of high school principals, the days of the building principal functioning solely as a manager are gone. Therefore, it is important for district leaders and policy-makers to understand the leadership functions of the building principal within the context of this changing landscape. If the job of the principal continues to be a demanding job, then it is critical for district leaders to understand what attracts and keeps principals in the position so that highly effective principals are equipped to continue to lead in these turbulent times.

District leaders and policy-makers can use the information provided in this study to understand that the high school principalship is a taxing job but a principal can experience job satisfaction if the proper support is in place to ensure success. Examining the themes found from this study can provide insight as to how to attract and retain principals in the position. For example, understanding that *working with and influencing students* is a major contributor to a principal’s job satisfaction may help leaders to
contemplate these dynamics when structuring the job responsibilities of the high school principal.

Similarly, if we understand that bureaucracy, paperwork, politics, and lack of support or trust detract from job satisfaction, then district leaders can offer support in such a way as to minimize the effects of some of these things. In terms of longevity, it seems that a principal achieves longevity if they work in a supportive community. Additionally, a principal may experience longevity if they appear to possess certain personality traits such as a positive attitude, a competitive personality and a strong work ethic.

Each of the principals expressed enjoyment and fulfillment with his position and did not necessarily have aspirations of moving up to a central office administrator or superintendent position. In fact, many of them indicated that they have chosen to stay in the high school principal position as this job was their passion. If we take what we know about principals who have found satisfaction and attained longevity, then district leaders can work to augment the working conditions of those educators who express the high school principalship as their destiny. By taking what we know about principal job satisfaction and maximizing the conditions surrounding the work of these leaders, we can ultimately keep highly effective people in the position and have a positive effect on student achievement.

A final recommendation would be to examine hiring practices when high school building principals are selected. If we know what experiences contribute to or detract from job satisfaction and longevity, then that information can be used to when designing succession plans for principals and for hiring practices when there is a vacancy. It would
be important to find a “good fit” for an employee to match with the position which ultimately would play a key role in the satisfaction and longevity of that employee. With this study and others, district leaders can use this information to make suitable personnel decisions.

**Implications for Future Research**

My study was completed in order to gain an understanding of what high school principals find satisfying about their job, what they find as dissatisfying about their job, and what contributes to or detracts from their longevity. Job satisfaction is a concept that has been studied in a variety of settings. Quantitative studies have provided information for researchers but few qualitative studies have been conducted on the topic.

There have also been numerous studies on job satisfaction for teachers but the research on principals is limited. Principals in this study were engaging and optimistic about being able to share their thoughts regarding job satisfaction and longevity. This study was limited to principals from a specific geographic area but the findings can provide some insight for school leaders, superintendents, and boards of education. Attracting and retaining quality candidates for the high school principal position is critical at this time in our nation’s history. Schools are consistently held to higher standards and asked to do more for students. Workplace production increases when individuals are satisfied and committed to their jobs (Brief & Weiss, 2002). Knowing what principals find satisfying about their position and why some principals have been able to stay in a position for a length of time is helpful information for legislators and state and national leaders as well.
Principals find their work satisfying if they can build relationships with, and influence students and staff, and lead them through the change process to improve. When principals get caught up in paperwork and bureaucracy, and implementing state and federal mandates, they dislike their work. This is a critical finding that can be shared with anyone who has a vested interest in seeing our high schools be successful in educating all students.

As the people of our nation wrestle with indeterminate economic times, changing family dynamics, and an uncertain future, education increasingly becomes the focus as the institution that can address our country’s complex problems. Education continues to change and educators continue to experience pressure like never before as the increased focus on student achievement becomes the norm. At the forefront of this is the building principal.

The numbers of high school principals that remain in their position for an extended period of time are decreasing. Principals are not staying in one building and committing to serve the families and community within which they work for a protracted period of time. This study provided some insight on the part of principals who have remained for at least five years in their current position. It should be noted that all of these principals work in suburban or rural areas. Is it because of this fact, that they attain longevity and find satisfaction in their work despite the position being viewed by some as undesirable? Future research could address this question and others.

Principals who have remained in their position in urban areas could be a focus of study. The fact that I did not locate an urban principal who met the criteria for this study in terms of length of service is a telling statement. Future studies could be done in this...
area as well. Furthermore, studies could be conducted to examine principals who have not attained longevity and work in suburban and rural high schools. Looking at why they are not experiencing job satisfaction or have not attained longevity may provide some insight for educational leaders and policy makers.

Finally, more studies could be conducted in the quantitative tradition by gathering perceptual data. Survey instruments could be developed around some of the themes that emerged from this study to gather data on what principals find satisfying or dissatisfying about their position. As the landscape of education continues to change, it will be critical to continue not only to identify building leaders but also to retain effective principals in their positions.

**Conclusion**

Chapter I offered background information and a conceptual framework of job satisfaction in the context of the high school principal position. Chapter II provided several concepts in the literature review which provided some rationale as to why a study like this should have been done. The methodology was outlined in Chapter III, and Chapter IV presented the findings from the phenomenological study. Chapter V reviewed the findings in the context of previous research as well as through the lens of the conceptual framework.

There is much that can be learned from this study of high school principal job satisfaction and longevity. Understanding that high school principals value relationships with the students and staff in their buildings and is a determinant in their job satisfaction is something that all district leaders must be aware of when structuring the job of the principal. It is important for superintendents and boards of education to be aware of this
information when hiring, managing, and caring for the individuals that occupy this
important position.

The individuals in this study worked in suburban or rural school districts in high
schools with average to above average student achievement. They reportedly enjoy the
environment they work in, and value their relationships with students and staff
immensely. They also feel support from their community and superiors. We can speculate
that these might be some of the reasons for their longevity and the fact that they, in
general, did not have aspirations to move to another position. It is important to take this
information and continue to look at the human side of education and the emphasis on
quality relationships that appeared to be present in this study.

Policy makers will continue to create and change rules and regulations governing
education. High school principals will see the resulting paperwork and bureaucracy as
contributors to job dissatisfaction. Legislators should be mindful of the resulting impact
of new legislation on the building leader. Much too often the bureaucratic interpretation
of the policies adds significant amounts of paperwork, with questionable value to the
principal. The other drawback to increasing bureaucratic record keeping required of the
principal is public perception. Principals want to function as leaders, not stat keepers.
Reducing their role to that of a “paper pusher” can have negative consequences on the
overall ability of the building leader.

As a student who participated in public education, I am firm believer in this
system and the role of education in creating productive citizens that can function in a
democratic society. The perception that the high school principal position may be viewed
as an undesirable position is of concern to me. Working with students at the high school
level is vitally important to the future of our nation. High school teachers have a very important job and the high school principal needs to be a forward-thinking scholar with the interpersonal skills to direct and support the important work of these educators.

If we are going to work toward a “New Normal” as State Superintendent of Michigan Schools Mike Flanagan suggests, then the importance of the high school principal position and the person that occupies that position cannot be overstated. It is critical that we care for the individuals in these positions by being aware of the trials and tribulations of the job itself, as well as the elements that contribute to a person’s longevity in that job.
REFERENCES

Achieve, Inc. (2010). *Opening doors: College and career ready high school graduation requirements.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 481 543)


Appendix A

Initial Email Script Sent to Potential Participants
Dear: __________________

My name is Peg Mathis and I am the Superintendent of Newaygo Public Schools in Newaygo, Michigan. In addition to my administrative duties, I am also a doctoral student at Western Michigan University. I am writing to ask you to be part of a qualitative research study on high school principals who have attained longevity in the position. Specifically, I am studying principals who have been in their current position for at least five years.

Your participation in this study will include engaging in an interview with me to discuss your experiences as a high school principal. Following your agreement to participate, an interview will be scheduled in your office at a time that is convenient for you. This interview will take approximately sixty minutes and will be audio-recorded for transcription. I will also take some written notes during the interview. Approximately one week after the interview, I will then ask you to review the transcript and make any necessary changes to the responses.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing from the study. If you agree to participate in this study, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and school will not appear in the study.

As an educational leader, I would be grateful if you would consider this invitation to participate. I look forward to learning about your experiences as a high school principal. If you are interested in participating in this study, I ask you to simply reply to this email or contact me at the number provided below. I will be following up with a phone call to you within the next week.

After I have a potential commitment from you, I will contact you to establish a time to review information about the study, the consent form, and a time to conduct the interview. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 616-308-2575 or email me at pmathis@newaygo.net. Thank you for considering possible participation in this study.

Respectfully,

Peggy A. Mathis
Appendix B

Consent Form
You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Experiences of High School Principals Who Have Attained Longevity in the Position." This project will serve as Peggy Mathis’ dissertation project for the requirements of the doctorate in educational leadership. This consent document 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 study is to gain an understanding of the ability for principals who stay in the position for five years or more to thrive in the position for an extended period of time. I hope to develop an understanding of what principals find satisfying about their job, what experiences contribute to their satisfaction, and what experiences detract from their satisfaction. I also hope to delve into how principals explain their longevity in the job.

Who can participate in this study?
Individuals who work in the member schools of the Ottawa-Kent Conference which is located in the western region of Michigan, are the initial people asked to learn more about the study. From that pool of subjects, it will be determined who has at least five years in the position and those individuals will be asked to participate. If enough participants are not available, then snowball sampling will occur to gain more participants that work in a high school that is not located in the Ottawa-Kent Conference.

Where will this study take place?
Data collection will occur in your school office or some other mutually-agreed upon location.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will last 45-60 minutes. The interview will be taped. After the interview, it will be transcribed and the transcript of the interview will be emailed to you within one week to check for accuracy. This will take you approximately 30-60 minutes to read the transcript and return it to me.
What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
While participating in this study, you will be asked multiple open-ended questions about your preparation for becoming a principal, what you find satisfying about the position, and what things detract from your job satisfaction. This will involve an open dialogue with me about your work experiences as a high school principal.

What information is being measured during the study?
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 and how will these risks be minimized?
There are limited risks to you as a participant in this study, as the interview questions are not of a sensitive nature.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
Benefits of participating in this study include you being able to talk about your experiences and your job. Understanding how high school principals are experiencing job satisfaction can provide important insights to all building leaders, superintendents, school board members, legislators, and policy-makers.

Are there any costs associated with 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 during this study?
Those who will have access to the information collected during this study include me, the transcriptionist, and my advisor, Dr. Sue Poppink. The results of this study will be presented in the form of a dissertation upon favorable defense. 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 the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your 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 primary investigator, Dr. Sue Poppink at 269-387-3569 or sue.poppink@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use 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 take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

___________________________________
Participant’s signature

______________________________
Date
Appendix C

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval
Date: November 17, 2011

To: Sue Poprink, Principal Investigator
    Peggy Mathis, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Victoria Janson, Interim Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 11-09-16

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Experiences of High School Principals Who Have Longevity in the Position” 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 that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. 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.

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

Approval Termination: November 17, 2012
Appendix D

Interview Guide
Background Information
Explanation of the research and assurance of protection of identification
Demographics
Age, ethnicity, gender, educational background, number of years as Principal

Preparation for the Principal position
Education
High school, undergrad, graduate, any other certifications
Work Experience
Describe the teaching positions, assistant principal or other administrative positions you have held.
Influences
Identify the people and/or mentors who encouraged you to pursue administration
Identify any programs you were involved in or coursework you took that helped you decide to pursue the principalship.

Factors contributing to Job Satisfaction
Identify characteristics that make the job of high school principal enjoyable.
What do you like about going to your job every day?
With what areas of your job are you most satisfied?

Factors contributing to Job Dissatisfaction
Identify characteristics that make the job of high school principal not enjoyable.
What do you dislike about going to your job every day?
With what areas of your job are you least satisfied?

Identify the things that have kept you in the position for the number of years you have been there.
What is it that keeps from pursuing another position or leaving your current position?
Describe the key reasons why you persist to remain in this position.