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Not for the Faint of Heart: An Informal Review of the Literature on Stress Among School Administrators

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Introduction: The Challenge of Stress in School Leadership

> *Principals may have the most complex job in education. Entrusted with children's learning and safety, and responsible for stewardship of a historical symbol of community hopes for the future, principals operate at the nexus of public policy, family values, community aspirations, and emerging knowledge. The job always has been difficult and dynamic, responding to the evolving needs of students, the changing economy, and the nation's priorities. But the challenges now facing school leaders are so significant and have such high stakes that they threaten the survival of the principalship as we know it.*
>
> Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, & Muth, 2007, p. 1.

> *"It's so hard sometimes. I feel like I'm drowning. While I try to adhere to standards, and comply with new evaluation rubrics for teachers, I know that there's more that's needed.... Given what I face every day I'm not able to do what I know matters most. I'm not sure how long I can sustain this. It's not only me. It's others as well." —High School Principal.*
>
> Drago-Severson, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Blum-Destefano, 2018, p. 315.

School administrators face intensifying work demands and increased scrutiny. The role is challenging and isolating. For women, minorities, rural school leaders, and those new to administration, there are additional challenges to face. The first quote above serves as the opening for a recent textbook written to equip aspiring school administrators. And yet, the issues of personal mission, self-care, wellness, stress, burnout, and resilience that are so poignantly expressed by a high school principal in the second quote are not addressed at all in the textbook. The expectations, knowledge, and processes—the "how to"—essential to success are detailed in the text, but the "why" that drives leaders and the personal sustainability challenges typical of the work are ignored. Also largely ignored is the role of wisdom in navigating the complex world of school administrators, which is increasingly vital in an era of accountability, social justice leadership, and expectations of swift "turnaround" work in schools.

Research into stress in organizations mushroomed beginning a half century ago (e.g., Khan, Wolfe, Quinn, Snock, & Rosenthal, 1964), and concern about the difficult work of educators in general and school administrators in particular emerged as a specific area of

investigation. A generation ago, in an article for the American School Boards Association (Carr, 2003), a former school board chair asserted, “The toughest job in America today is school leadership,” and added, “Public schools are on the front lines of democracy, urban school systems in particular. We’re dealing with all of the societal issues that everyone else is too afraid to even talk about. It’s tough, tough work” (p. 14). In that same year, Langer and Boris-Schacter (2003) reported on their three-year study of over 200 principals and observed, “The American principal today is being held responsible for student achievement while working at a job that is emotionally depleting, excessively time-consuming, and defined by ambiguous responsibilities and authority” (p. 15).

It is essential for those shaping programs to prepare future school administrators and support leaders in the field to have a thorough understanding of the many challenges that can make it difficult for school leaders to simply survive, let alone thrive. Some challenges are common to nearly all school leaders, but challenges unique to individual leaders are shaped by circumstance, personal characteristics, and choices made along the way. Keeping that in mind, we will now review the current literature on the difficulties school leaders experience.

Stressors Common to School Leaders

Stress is a familiar companion to educational leaders, but it is important to note that stress is simply a part of human life. In medical terms, stress is “any challenge to the integrity or survival of the organism” (Carr, Kodish, & Vitaliano, 2018, p. 54), and the stress response is a complex interaction of mind and body. Significant research has focused on the negative effects of stress on brain function (e.g., Sapolsky, 2004) and health (e.g., Cassidy, 1999), but humans experience stress in positive ways when the body responds with necessary actions. That kind of “positive stress” is typically referred to as *eustress* (Kupriyanov & Zhadanov, 2014), and has been

incorporated into management practice and instructional pedagogy by way of re-interpretation—and possibly misinterpretation—of the Yerkes-Dodson Law from over a century ago (Teigen, 1994) which asserts that optimal performance requires the appropriate level of stress. However, if *distress* is experienced instead of *eustress*, and the stress is chronic and not managed successfully, trouble ensues.

Fevre, Mathey, and Kolt (2003) have argued that organizational applications of stress research that involve tapping the "good" use of stress miss the mark and add to the problem. In what might be a worst-case scenario, Hewlett and Luce (2006) described "extreme jobs" in companies that richly rewarded workers willing to embrace unbalanced lives (60-hour and more work weeks) and sustained intensity, all combining to leave no room for other aspects of life. Rather than feel exploited, these "extreme job" super-achievers often "wear their commitments like badges of honor" and "feel exalted" (Hewlett & Luce, pp. 51-52). That kind of "extreme" ethos in an organization makes similar levels of demand the organizational norm. Those who embrace the expectations thrive while others either leave or burnout.

Regardless of how ethically or effectively stress is leveraged in the workplace, it is clear that for those who experience chronic stress on the job (and/or in life outside work), serious physical and psychological problems can be the consequence (Cassidy, 1999; Carr, Kodish, & Vitaliano, 2018; Cooper, Quick, & Schabracq, 2009). In his review of research on the complex connection between stress and both mental and physical health, Salleh (2008) asserted that "almost every system in the body can be influenced by chronic stress" (p. 11). However, the same stressors result in different effects, depending upon the individual. "One person's severe 'stressor' may be only another person's moderate challenge" (Carr et al, p. 60). That individuality of experience reflects the prevailing theoretical model for understanding stress as "the interaction between the

person and their environment based on a model of the person as active and exercising agency in the process" (Cassidy, 1999, p. 9).

Personal characteristics and situational factors are important, but they do not combine to tell the whole story about—let alone accurately predict—the stress experience of a leader. Therefore, blanket statements concerning the role of stress for any group such as school administrators must be viewed with caution and the range of the actual stress experiences of individuals must be kept in mind.

Research on stress among educators began with a focus on teachers, and sufficient findings were produced during the 1960s and 1970s that the National Education Association produced a booklet titled, "Stress and the Classroom Teacher: What Research Says to the Teacher" (Swick & Hanley, 1980). Besides providing an introduction to the concept of stress, the document pointed to intrapersonal, interpersonal, and situational stressors, and offered guidance for teachers on how to positively respond to stress and craft a personal stress management plan. That focus on the individual as the agent of change in addressing stress continues to be the dominant perspective.

Stress research soon moved on to administrators (Koch, Tung, Gmelch, & Swent, 1982; Wax & Hales, 1987). As with teachers, from the beginning there was interest in the ways that chronic stress may end up in burnout and result in leaders exiting the profession. Studies have yielded consistent results over the years, including the pervasiveness of the phenomenon, and there have been some surprising findings. For example, it is often assumed that high school principals have more stressful jobs than principals at other levels. However, Boyland's (2011) study of 193 elementary principals in Indiana found that over half (53.6%) reported experiencing moderate job stress, and 38.5% experienced high job stress. Just 7.8% had low job stress.

Studies of the lived experience of school level administrators consistently identify several job demands that fuel stress. These include a lack of time to complete required tasks (Sogunro, 2012; Mahfouz, 2018; and Pollock, 2017), general workload (Mahfouz, 2020; Boyland, 2011; Torelli & Gmelch, 1992; and Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2017), and the persistent challenge of work-life balance (Mahfouz, 2018; Lovell, 2016; and Gray, 2014) which is especially demanding for leaders who are parents in dual-career families with young children (e.g., Zeeck, 2012). As one elementary principal lamented, "There is simply not enough time to work on your own agenda and have balance between home and school" (Boyland, 2011, p. 6)

Leading in the Middle

Stresses associated with mandates imposed upon school level leaders, whether federal, state, or local in origin, are also ubiquitous (Sogunro, 2012; Mahfouz, 2020; Pollock, 2017). Central to that stressor is the leader's role as middle manager, shielding staff from some mandates, modifying others, and implementing skillfully in order to provide space for staff to focus on the most important work as new demands are added on a regular basis. As Bailey (2013) described it,

> Being a principal is like being caught in the middle of a tug of war. One end of the rope is the state and school board. The other end is held by the students/teachers/families in your school. I get pulled and pushed from both directions…Not every idea that comes down the pike is a good one that helps teachers/students. I need to buffer those.

This kind of leadership is not unique to education, and is described in what Lipsky (2010) described as the work of "street level bureaucrats" who exercise agency in determining how best to respond to mandates from policymakers that require levels of resource that are not available at the point of service. Similar leadership practices in the corporate world have been described as being an "umbrella carrier" (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020) for subordinates. In education, this has

been termed as the work of *bricoleurs* (Koyama, 2014), meaning those who engage in "brokering" or "buffering" (LeChasseur, Donaldson, Fernandez, & Femc-Bagwell, 2018; Wenner & Settlage, 2015), or practice other forms of "policy workarounds" (Miller, 2011). Whatever the term, such work contains risks for leaders in the political power structures of all educational organizations, and especially in public schools where political and social conflicts are part of the warp and woof of life in the local community.

The Emotional Labor of Leadership

Much of the stress of leadership is similar across occupational contexts, but educational leaders face some stressors that are less evident to other settings (Sogunro, 2012; Mahfouz, 2018; Torelli & Gmelch, 1992; Pollock, 2017). For example, educational leaders are beholden to a variety of stakeholders: staff members, parents, teacher unions, upper administration, etc. Relational demands with such an array of groups adds to the emotional labor of leaders, and for school administrators this emotional labor has expanded as the demand for collaborative leadership has become the professional norm (Maxwell & Riley, 2017). Since principals are expected to manage their emotions in order to project a professional image (Berkovich & Ayal, 2015), when internal emotions do not match what is to be expressed, it forces leaders to suppress their feelings, a strategy that has negative health consequences (Maxwell & Riley, 2017).

The most intense emotional demands on administrators come when crises and traumatic events require that leaders guide others through difficult times. While these are episodic stressors, they take a significant toll (Sogunro, 2012). There is increasing attention to the effects of trauma on students and a growing recognition that administrators must be skillful in leading schools in addressing the needs of others that are rooted in trauma. However, the effects of "second-hand trauma" among those who care for the traumatized has been identified as an

important concern among administrators (e.g., DeMatthews, Carrola, Izquierdo, & Knight, 2018).

Administrator as School Salesperson

The "market" model of schooling has gained political advocates in many Western countries and has added demands and stress to the work of administrators. Bunnell (2012) points out that the acceleration of competition and choice that has accompanied the growing educational marketplace approach to schooling has brought with it "uncertainties and ambiguities about the role of the principal and the school faculty," and as a consequence, "the role of the school leader expanded greatly as a result of educational marketization" (p. 91).

As chief marketer, the building administrator has additional work to do to enhance the school's appeal in the marketplace. Urgency is added to the ubiquitous pressure to produce strong achievement outcomes, and marketing skill becomes a necessity for leadership success. For those leading schools deemed desirable, that positive image must be maintained. For those leading schools deemed undesirable, valued outcomes and a positive shift in public opinion must be achieved. In this work, principals are also faced with the stress of deciding what role teachers will be required to take. Adding marketing to the responsibilities of teachers carries with it a number of risks, including the possibility of negatively impacting the very learning outcomes that are the "product" selective consumers of educational options desire.

The Unique Stresses of the Superintendency

Though the research on superintendent stress is limited, it is clear that there is significant overlap between the experience of building level leaders and system level leaders, but there are important differences as well. Working at higher levels in the power structure, superintendents must address legal issues, school board relationships, difficulties that often arise in engagement

with various community groups, community micro-politics, and large-scale funding issues along with many of the same stressors building administrators encounter. Robinson and Shakeshaft (2016) organized superintendent stressors into three categories, groupings that are supported by other studies of superintendent stress (Antonucci, 2012; Hawk & Martin, 2011; Lamkin, 2006). The superintendent stress groupings are:

- *Time*: time required to do the job, work-life balance, work outside normal working hours, and multi-tasking demands.
- *State and Federal Constraints*: inadequate finances, national reform mandates, constant state and federal regulation changes, and achievement accountability measures.
- *Group Demands*: special interest groups, school board relations, and community relations.

The third category—Group Demands—contains much that is unique about superintendent stress as compared to other school administrators. Difficulties with board relationships and local politics are the primary factors when superintendents unexpectedly leave a position (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006; Evert & Van Deuren, 2013).

The Stressors Unique to Assistant Principals

Most research on stress examines the work of superintendents and principals, but a study of vice principals (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2017) found differences in the barriers to thriving experienced by principals as compared to assistant principals. The major stressors identified in the work of assistant principals were: time demands, community environment, political environment, principal leadership, staff management, students'/parents' influence, and teacher influence. About 43% of the assistant principals admitted that they could rarely or never balance work and home responsibilities. Most of these findings are similar to the experiences of other school leaders, but one key difference is that assistant principals work under the authority of the

principal, and the relationship involves close, daily engagement. This can be a blessing or a curse, and it is typically a little of both.

Intensification and Increasing Complexity

It may be argued that stress has always been a part of school leadership, and what leaders face today is just a modern version of an age-old challenge. However, substantial research points to a steady increase in the nature and intensity of the stresses school leaders face. There is evidence (e.g. Reames, Kochan, & Zhu, 2014) that increasing mandates and expanding demands of the work are becoming the primary considerations regarding school administrators leaving the field, trumping the former primary reasons for leaving: the desire to seek new opportunities and unhappiness with local politics.

Some scholars view the history of school leadership as a story of shifting contexts and an evolutionary process that features as a central continuity the challenge and complexity of the work. For example, according to Hallinger, (1992), change in the principalship since 1960 has been characterized by eras that are identifiable based upon what was expected of leaders. He asserts that the era of the program manager came first, moved on to the era of the instructional leader, and that we are now experiencing the era of the transformational leader. Hallinger details how school administrators began that evolution with an emphasis on program management, with high value placed on running efficient systems. With growing concern about curriculum and instructional outcomes, by the 1980s administrator focus shifted to instructional leadership. By the end of the 20th Century, the importance of reform era expectations and the foundational changes such change leadership required made transformational leadership central to what is expected of school administrators today.

Hallinger's description of leadership eras is useful for understanding the historical context, but the consensus in research is that change in educational leadership has been more than simply an evolution of the role. Instead, for many, it is more accurate to view the change as a "layering on," which has been described as "an accumulation of expectations that have increased the complexity of the position" (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle, 2005, pp. 1-2). Crow (2006) enumerated the factors behind the increased complexity, which mirrors changes in leadership in other fields necessitated by the shift to a post-industrial society. Even Kafka (2009), who asserted that "although specific pressures might be new, the call for principals to accomplish great things with little support, and to be all things to all people, is certainly not," still recognized, "What is new is the degree to which schools are expected to resolve society's social and educational inequities in a market-based environment" (p. 328).

The evidence is compelling that it is harder to be a principal today than it was in the past, the demands of the job are accelerating. This trend has been a matter of concern for several decades. Over twenty years ago, Stanford's Michael Copland observed in *Phi Delta Kappan*, an important practitioner journal, that "prevailing expectations associated with the principal's role are excessively high," and he added, "If prompted, veteran principals will tell you that the expectations associated with the principalship have mushroomed over the past 20 years" (2001, p. 529). Copland suggested that expanding job demands were fostered by expectations imposed upon the profession through the waves of intense reform and school improvement efforts that placed the principal at the center of theories of improvement. Such assumptions are rooted in enduring attachment to the "Great Man" theory of effective leadership that persists in American culture.

One example of the inflated vision of the "Great Man" (or woman) is the marvelous "Ms. Fran Washington" who is featured in Deal and Peterson's highly regarded book, *The Leadership Paradox* (1994). "Ms. Washington" is presented as "a stirring example of the prototypical principal" leaders should aspire to be, but she was in fact a creation of the authors, crafted by combining gleanings from hundreds of actual school leaders, a fact found in the book's footnotes and overlooked by most readers (p. 531).

Research provides consistent evidence from the field that the workload of school administrators has grown dramatically, especially with the advent of test-based accountability (Boyland, 2011; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Klocko & Wells, 2015; Leithwood & Azah, Harris, Slater, & Jantzi, 2014; Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014; Pollock, et al, 2017). Consistent with that pattern, the *Canadian Journal for Educational Administration and Policy* devoted an entire issue in 2019 to workload intensification, which was defined as "extended work hours, increased complexity and volume of work tasks, and an expansion of day to day responsibilities" (Briscoe & Whalen, 2019, p. 2).

A closer look at findings from a few exemplary studies on these mushrooming expectations provides a more detailed picture of the factors that hinder flourishing for school leaders. For example, in their study of over 1500 principals in Virginia, DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) detailed the growing demands that accompanied reduced resources, resulting in expanded expectations. They observed, "Although the principalship has always been a demanding, more than full-time job, committees and task forces formed to study educational reform seem to conclude that principals must simply do more" (p. 43).

Klocko and Wells' (2015) findings support that observation. They tracked increases in perceptions of changes in stress among over 700 K-12 principals from a midwestern state over a

three-year period. Increases were found in the following stressors: “Loss of personal time, Feelings of being overwhelmed with job demands, Conducting teacher evaluations, Reports to the district and state, General loss of joy in doing this work, Increased performance expectations from central office, Job expectations of the principalship, Work-life balance, and Responding to student test score results” (Klocko & Wells, pp. 12-13). In a review of research on school principals in the US from 2003-2013, Bredeson (2016) concluded by pointing out that “there is general agreement that the current tasks and responsibilities of school principals, especially those assigned to large, diverse, urban community settings, are too much for any person to reasonably handle” (p. 301), and yet the expectations continue to grow.

Looking again across the border to Canada, the situation is quite similar, as findings from a study of building administrators in Ontario attest (Leithwood et al, 2014). At both the secondary and elementary levels, time to focus on school improvement work and do what’s needed to develop teachers for the work, the volume of emails, and handling personnel matters were all identified as stressors that had expanded. A common refrain was the message from school administrators to top management: “Stop telling us to do more with less.” Unique to secondary administrators was the increased workload to collaborate in order to make increasing distributed leadership models function well.

In another study in Ontario (Pollock et al, 2014), 423 principals in the province were surveyed concerning changes in work demands. The results pointed to new regulations and policies that had to be implemented at the school level as a major impact on daily work. The study also noted the view that “the principalship has become so structured and rooted in compliance that there is little room for principals to demonstrate professional judgement or

autonomy in their daily work" (p. 3). Additionally, reduced job satisfaction concurrent with this intensification among these leaders was reported by Wang, Pollock, and Hauseman (2018).

Social Isolation

Decreasing social connections and the consequent drop in social capital became part of the national discourse when political scientist Robert Putnam's book *Bowling Alone* became a bestseller in 2000. These concerns have continued to grow, and for an increasing portion of the American population, isolation leads to the psychological and biological effects of chronic loneliness (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). The cause is typically not deficiency in social skills. Instead, "Problems arise when feeling lonely makes us less likely to employ the skills we have" (Cacioppo & Patrick, p. 14). Vulnerability based on an inherited predisposition, the ability to self-regulate in the midst of times of isolation, and the negative ways we think about ourselves and others all contribute to chronic loneliness (pp. 14-15).

Though both genetic predisposition and environmental factors play a part, leadership tends to isolate, exacerbating the factors that can lead to disconnection, isolation, and chronic loneliness. Gray (2014) captured the irony of this common experience in educational leadership with the term "crowded loneliness," which refers to the way the role of a school leader involves being among people all the time and yet, at the same time, is often accompanied by a feeling of being quite alone. Ruth Haley Barton (2008) refers to this as a paradox of leadership, noting that "we can be surrounded by people and be very busy doing good things and yet feel deeply alone with the burdens we bear" (p. 170).

Back in 1977, Philip Jackson's article, "Lonely at the Top: Observations on the Genesis of Administrative Isolation," appeared in *The School Review*. His essay is a thoughtful reflection on his personal experience of loneliness as a school administrator and his lack of preparation for

that reality. He reflected that "one of the chief residues of my own administrative experience is the memory of having felt alone, not in the simple physical sense of being by myself, without companions, but in the deeper psychological sense of being apart from others" (p. 427). He was aware of constant scrutiny by others and being treated differently because of his role. The limitations of his power, which others did not understand, his knowledge of secrets he could not share, and the steady stream of criticism that comes with leadership and decision-making added to his isolation.

Three decades later, an article in a practitioner journal for school superintendents co-authored by a superintendent and a professor of educational leadership (Jazzar & Kimball, 2004) presented a summary of research on the superintendent experience. The findings echoed the isolation described by Jackson back in 1977. They found that fellow administrators "do not see until they are a superintendent how lonely it is" (p. 11), and even those closest to the superintendent really do not understand the work or the role.

For most superintendents, the job is short-term, and the transient nature of the role has prompted some to compare it to a form of migrant labor. Others have compared it to the iconic "Lone Ranger" who is brought in to make change but inevitably ruffles feathers in the process, causing the once-lauded superintendent to move on or be forced out. Given that reality, isolation is often an accepted part of the job.

The experience of isolation in leadership is not unique to education, and it is evident among leaders in other countries, as well. For example, Zumaeta (2018) investigated how senior leaders in a non-educational setting in Chile navigated the need to belong, loneliness, and managerial well-being, and documented findings that echo the experiences of top school leaders. All of the participants reported loneliness, struggled with issues of belonging, but considered

these challenges to be part of the job. Factors related to their role that contributed were increased social distancing (which included lack of authenticity, lack of honest feedback, and avoidance by subordinates); lack of supportive relationships with peers (who were often competitors for resources or power) or superiors; and exhaustion from work demands, which left them with little energy to cultivate positive connections outside of work.

As with all aspects of well-being, individual experiences vary. Wright (2012) explored leadership loneliness in all organizations and identified the causes that commonly create executive isolation, but also described the unique resources available to top leaders to counteract the conditions that contribute to loneliness. Wright concluded, "loneliness is a professional hazard of senior positions, yet to some extent, it can be managed, as it is also dependent on contextual conditions" (p. 12). However, the causes, conditions, and power leaders have in each situation differs, which only magnifies the importance of considering each leader as a unique case. Looking across the landscape of all the individual experiences, Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) characterize the common struggle with isolation among school leaders this way:

> An administrator has virtually no time for reflection or talk with trusted colleagues about concerns and fears. Although surrounded by teachers, students, staff, and parents, a leader can easily be isolated and may have to bear the burden of leadership alone. The chronic work-life tensions a leader experiences present him with significant personal obstacles. (p. 11)

Workaholism and Burnout

Workaholism has been defined as "an addiction to work that involves feeling compelled or driven to work because of internal pressures, having persistent and frequent thoughts about work when not working, and working beyond what is reasonably expected (as established by the requirements of the job or basic economic needs) despite potential negative consequences"

(Clark, Michel, Zhdanova, Pui, & Baltes, 2016, p. 1840). Workaholics have great difficulty disengaging from work to engage in other life activities, and the addiction to work is accompanied by a lack of proper self-care and recovery (Innanen, Tolvnen, & Salmela-Aro, 2014).

Workaholism is often confused with work engagement, which is defined by Attridge (2009) as, "when employees feel positive emotions toward their work, find their work to be personally meaningful, consider their workload to be manageable, and have hope about the future of their work" (p. 384). Research has identified three elements to engagement: exertion of energy, emotional investment, and mental absorption in the work. To an observer, both workaholics and engaged workers look similar. However, while work engagement provides positive work and life outcomes, workaholism has a negative effect on the worker, the organization, and home life (Clark et al., 2016).

Of course, administrators are expected to work long hours, including evenings and weekends, and most assume that is a part of the job. McKay (2004) observed, "For most [school administrators], career successes have been the result in the commitment of many hours beyond the normal workday" (p. 8). He noted that most school leaders consider the label "workaholic" to be "a compliment and an accurate description of their path to upward career mobility" (p. 8). The assumption that leaders will work whatever hours it takes to do the job is an expectation met by workaholics driven by external motivations, whereas the engaged leader is motivated by internal forces (van Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2011). In an "overwork climate" where excessive time commitments are the norm, the engaged leader and the workaholic leader may be hard to distinguish, but those predisposed to workaholism are more likely to escalate workaholic behaviors and slide towards burnout (Mazzetti, Schaufeli, & Guglielmi, 2014).

Though the term "burnout" is well-known, work towards a clinical and scholarly understanding of the phenomenon has only been a focus since the 1970s. As refined through the work of Maslach and others (see Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2010, for an overview), burnout has come to be understood as having three components. Perhaps the most concerning aspect in terms of well-being is *emotional exhaustion*, which is the experience of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by your work. Another is *depersonalization*, which is evidenced by unfeeling and impersonal responses towards coworkers and those served. Finally, feeling incompetent and unsuccessful erodes any sense of *personal accomplishment* (Lee & Ashforth, 1990).

Social service professionals were studied for the effects of sustained engagement with the problems of troubled others (Maslach, 1976). The job demands for educators are quite similar, and the research quickly extended to teachers, beginning with daycare workers (Maslach & Pine, 1977; Swick & Hanley, 1980). Managers in these fields were included as burnout research expanded significantly beginning in the 1980s. Initial explorations of burnout among school administrators (e.g., Wax & Hales, 1987) were followed by more robust research efforts in the 1990s and there was a concurrent increase in attention in practitioner journals (Torelli & Gmelch, 1992). Ever since, the unique features of stress and burnout as experienced by administrators has been a concern in educational research (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003; Boyland, 2011; Combs, Edmonson, Jackson, & Greenville, 2009; Drago-Severson, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Blum-Destefano, 2018; Hawk and Martin, 2011; Sogunro, 2012).

Recent expansion of work demands on school leaders has added to the stressors that contribute to burnout concerns. For example, educators are privy to the personal accounts of the traumas experienced by others (students, staff, and community members), and in settings where

those stories are a constant part of the leadership experience, compassion fatigue (which is viewed as a form of secondary trauma) and burnout may result (DeMatthews et al, 2018). Those working in schools with students on mental health issues--such as counselors, school psychologists, and social workers—typically receive training in self-care as part of their professional preparation, but the same is not true of educational leaders.

The International Scope of the Problem

Work overload, chronic stress, and burnout among educators are growing concerns, but this is not unique to the United States. Teachers were the initial research focus in other Western nations as they were in the United States (Vandenberge, Huberman, & Huberman, 1999). Research has since extended to administrators, not only in the US, but in international studies as well. Studies from Canada were discussed above, but similar findings have emerged from countries such as England (Thomson, 2009; Tucker, 2010), Greece (Leventis, Papakitsos, Karakiozis, & Argyriou, 2017), Germany (Weber, Weltle, & Lederer, 2005), and Israel (Friedman, 1995).

For example, one of the most impressive ongoing studies utilizes data from the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey, which was instituted in 2011. The annual survey gathers responses from principals and assistant principals in public and private schools across the country. The most recent report (Riley & See, 2019), which incorporated 2018 data, detailed a pattern of long work hours, including working over holidays, that is deemed "too high for a healthy lifestyle to be maintained" (p. 14). Top stressors identified over the years in this ongoing study have consistently been workload demands and lack of time to focus on instructional leadership. Of the top ten stressors identified by administrators in the most recent data, eight were at their highest levels, reflecting a rising tide of stress across the profession.

At a more comprehensive level, the affective aspect of educational leadership as a broad category has only recently received attention in research. There is much about the role of emotions in school leadership that has not been explored. However, in their review of recent studies, Berkovich and Eyal (2015) identified several themes that hold true across international contexts. Leaders' emotions are influenced by several factors, including the degree of autonomy and support provided by supervisors, the organizational climate, and the pressures that accompany the increasing competition and accountability. Emotional labor requires that administrators maintain a detached visage to align with expectations of leaders, turning emotions inward. Berkovich and Eyal note that the increased focus on performance indicators and the comparisons that fuel a marketization of schooling add to the emotional labor of administrators: "Principals reported dissonance between their performativity demands and their professional commitment or even moral calling to act on behalf of students' interests. This dissonance led some principals to feel dishonest vis-a-vis staff, thereby intensifying their emotional distress" (p. 136).

Clearly, we are not alone in the United States as we address these concerns. Of course, it is difficult to capture the nuances of each unique person, both in making international comparisons and even across contexts in the United States, and the resulting effect on thriving in the life of each leader is impossible to predict.

The Rest of the Stress Story: Role, Context, and Identity

The manifold stressors reviewed to this point are persistent realities that hinder the pursuit of flourishing, though the specifics vary from leader to leader and from moment to moment. Added to that stew of stress are additional factors related to role, context, and identity. We now consider each of these factors in more detail.

Lack of "Fit"

In school leadership context matters, and success in one context does not assure success in the next. For example, it is a quite different experience leading wholesale change in an established school versus opening a new school; though both are herculean leadership challenges, the work is quite different in those two cases. And there are many other factors related to context and "fit" that can add to the stressors leaders must navigate. Beginning with the selection process, "fit" is a double-edged sword that can help connect skills, dispositions, and experience to a leadership position where flourishing for all will be the result, and it can be used as a cover for practices that perpetuate the status quo (Toombs, Lugg, & Bogotch, 2010).

Thirty years ago, it was the contention of Duke and Iwanicki (1990) that "school administration is more than a matter of behavioral competence" (p. 25). The authors asserted that effective administration is also a matter of "fit," which they defined as "the extent to which a leader is perceived to be appropriately matched to a given context" (p. 26). Few school leaders today would argue with this contention. "Fit" is commonly considered an important factor by educational leaders, especially in hiring decisions (Palmer, Kelly, Mullooly, 2016), though the meaning of "fit" is unclear, even to those who routinely employ the concept in decision-making. In fact, there is little in the literature to support most of the practices linked to beliefs about leadership fit, and that includes the assumption that a "good fit" hire yields better performance in a particular context.

Some have sought to shine a light into the murky concept of "fit," especially in an attempt to explore and explain the persistence of discriminatory hiring practices in educational leadership. According to Tooms, Lugg, and Bogotch (2010), "The ease and accessibility of ["fit"] blinds us from the interplay of social constructionism, identity theory, and hegemony that

reveals the complexity of its meaning" (p. 118). They assert, "Fit is not just about racism or sexism. It is about how one group can decide and perpetuate whichever values (and therefore reality) they choose under the guise of crafting who best 'fits' as a leader" (p. 121).

Nevertheless, the challenges for those who find themselves hired into an environment or organization where they are a "misfit" are real, if poorly understood. Not being a good "fit" adds significant stress, since "stress arises not from the person or environment separately, but rather by their fit or congruence with one another" (Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998, p. 28). This stress-inducing phenomenon is explained through Personal-Environment fit (P-E fit) theory (Edwards, et al.). P-E fit theory is an umbrella that includes sub-theories such as person-job fit, person-vocation fit, person-person fit, person-group, and person-organization fit, all of which offer useful tools to explore areas of "fit" in researching leaders. An example is the use of P-E fit theory in Trimble's (2013) study of stressors among superintendents.

The power of fit is such that leaders can do all that the role requires, and still not be accepted in the community or viewed as successful. What Duke and Iwanicki (1990) observed decades ago still holds true: "In some cases fit even goes beyond meeting the real job expectations and includes personal characteristics, such as the principal's style or socioeconomic, educational, or cultural background. Problems of this nature are characterized by comments such as, 'He gets the job done, but he's just not one of us. He just doesn't fit in'" (pp. 31-32).

Rural School Context

Perhaps the most common context where fit is an issue is in rural America. When filling a teaching position, common criteria include strong evidence of teaching skills, intelligence, indications of teacher leadership, and diversity. As Little and Miller (2007) found, it is more important for rural teacher candidates to hold the same values as the community, blend in, have

local ties, and to relate with the local residents. The research on "rural values" is contested, but Little and Miller's study utilized four rural values that have emerged from prior research and were most applicable in teacher hiring decisions: community-centrism, traditionalism, primary group preference, and social conservatism. Since administrators are by-in-large drawn from the teaching ranks, leaders hired from within a local community or from a similar rural background would be expected to either embrace these values, or at least understand and respect them. The research reflects that community expectation, and those hired from non-rural backgrounds face the most challenges in leading in a rural setting.

School leaders often begin their administrative careers in rural communities, even those raised in suburban or urban contexts. What Lamkin (2006) observed about superintendents applies to building level leaders as well: "service in rural school districts appears to fall at the bottom end of the 'pecking order': superintendents new to the role often were encouraged to 'begin' in rural districts and subsequently work their way 'up' to suburban and urban districts" (p. 21). The range of leadership challenges that rural positions entail (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013) often exposes a readiness gap between those who were raised in a rural setting and those who were not.

For example, school leaders in rural settings do not experience "community engagement" in the way it is experienced in urban and suburban schools. Rural administrators are part of a relational web that is personal. The metaphor of "living in a fishbowl" is the daily experience of leaders who are recognized often and expected to chat with parents or patrons when they go to the store, the park, or a local restaurant or coffee shop. All local institutions and events in rural communities are understood as gatherings that cannot be ignored by school leaders. For example, it is common for churches to play a significant community role (Copeland, 2013), and in many

small towns the question to new school leaders is not *whether* you go to church, but *which one* you attend. Such a highly visible life that involves ongoing social engagement is invigorating for some and exhausting for others. For most rural leaders, the challenge to create private space and boundaries—as all administrators must do—is engaged in a context that makes the challenge particularly difficult.

Those not raised in a similar context quickly discover that rural communities are "characterized by close-knit relationships among life-long residents and emotional response to considerations for change" (Lamkin, 2006, p. 19). Good relationships are central to the success of any school leader, but for rural leaders, the challenge of establishing strong, trusting relationships is magnified when you are an "outsider" who is expected to move on to another district at some point, and probably sooner than later. The difficulty increases, especially for superintendents, if the school board is made up of members who lack advanced education, have deep roots in the community, and hold considerable informal social power—conditions that are fairly common. Rural administrators are paid less than their peers in more populated areas, but they are typically among the highest paid residents in the community they serve. That adds to the potential for class-based conflict even for those leaders with personal rural roots.

Though rural schools and the communities they serve offer many quality of life advantages, steady economic decline and depopulation combine with the lack of available services in many rural areas to create significant challenges for the education of children (ChalkBoard, 2016). Rural administrators working in those communities face all the stressors common to other school leaders, but the challenges are intensified. For example, rural leaders must fulfill many roles simultaneously (Copeland, 2013). That "jack of all trades" expectation "is perceived to be more stressful than leading a larger district which has more support systems"

(Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016, p. 122), and the role of superintendent is often paired with responsibilities as a principal. One rural superintendent described the multifaceted nature of his work this way: "I have to handle transportation, contracts, building facilities, the work of the Board as opposed to the work of educating children… I wasn't prepared for the conflict that goes along with all the diverse tasks and issues that I faced" (Lamkin, 2006, p. 21). Another persistent challenge is difficulty recruiting and retaining quality staff, since most teachers want to teach in urban or suburban areas (Biddle & Azano, 2016).

While school events, performances, and sports may be an important part of family life in urban and suburban settings, in rural America the local school is often the hub of the entire community and central to local identity. While communities support their schools and want them to be "successful," the definition of "success" is often not shared between school leaders and the patrons. Athletics and other visible achievements are especially prized, and while academic improvement goals may be seen as praiseworthy, they may also be viewed as threatening. If "success" means the best and brightest go off to college and never return, the net effect is decline for rural towns and farming and ranching communities.

Leaders who push for academic success must contend, then, with the often-conflicting dual goals of student success and community flourishing. As Shuman (2010) observed from his study of rural principals, "many times rural schools and their communities do not agree on the purpose for education" (pp. 345-346), which resulted in the leaders' "struggle with maintaining a small school with a local focus while trying to provide a comprehensive program for students" (p. 346). Put bluntly, school success for students means options and opportunities, and "for rural students, social mobility often means moving away" (p. 346). The steadily increasing demands for results from district, state, and national authorities that typically emerge from processes that

fail to reflect such rural perspectives and the compliance paperwork that it entails is a growing burden for rural administrators who have to do all the same accountability paperwork as large districts, which has produced "function creep" (Starr & White, 2008, p. 4) and fostered resentment.

Research has consistently affirmed that women leaders in rural schools face gender-based challenges beyond what is encountered in urban and suburban contexts. This is understood to be the consequence of culturally conservative, male-dominated norms common in many rural communities (Bartling, 2013; Preston et al., 2013). Women who succeed in rural settings are able to navigate these hurdles and often push against them in creative ways. The narratives of retired female rural superintendents (Gammill & Vaughn, 2011) revealed five leadership approaches (or "prototypes") for women leaders who must discern the community's view of "acceptable womanhood" in order to lead in a manner aligned to, yet not be dictated by, the local culture. Wallin (2005) found that gender discrimination is especially evident in rural hiring practices, including a reluctance have women in the role of high school principal. That bias was reflective of a common belief that women are unable to handle high school level discipline issues and athletic programs. Wallin observed, "The high school principalship is still hallowed ground on which few women are invited to tread" (p. 151). Day to day discrimination rural women leaders encoutered included exclusion from deliberations, unequal salaries, and differences in work expectations based upon gender. Male teachers and school board members often refused to "answer to a woman" and women administrators were told they were not to take phone calls from their husbands (p. 145). The belief among women that they have to work harder and do better than men to succeed is common, and "Good Ol' Boys Club" exclusionary practices live on, though somewhat diminished in recent times.

Women & Minority Leaders

Research on the unique barriers and challenges faced by women and minorities in school leadership across all contexts is extensive and has been a focus for decades, as the review of research published in 1986 by Yeakey, Johnston, and Adkinson attests. Back then, the authors pointed out that "discrimination is as deceptively complex as it is pervasively subtle. And, what is true for Blacks is not necessarily true for members of other race/ethnic minority groups and may have nothing to do with the experiences of White women. The converse is also true" (p. 111). An intense effort to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce in schools has added urgency to more recent explorations of the topic. However, the results in terms of balancing gender representation and hiring and retaining minorities in the school administrator ranks have been disappointing (Hill, Ottem, & DeRoche, 2016; Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan, & Newcomb, 2017; Williams & Loeb, 2012), and it has been pointed out that since administrators come from the ranks of teachers, the failure to recruit and retain a diverse teaching force contributes to the lack of minority leaders (Haynes, 2015).

Looking first at the challenges facing minority school leaders, attempts have been made to identity the "deceptively complex" and "pervasively subtle" aspects of discrimination noted above that these leaders face. For example, minority leaders typically experience microaggressions (Krull & Robicheau, 2020), and Smith's (2019) rich study of the experience of "leading while Black" not only offers extraordinary insights into the motivations and challenges these educational leaders face in both public and private school contexts, but also details the systemic layers of power at work that hinder them. Informal networks continue to advantage Whites in recruitment and hiring, especially for the highest levels of leadership (Hill, 2018).

It is common for minority administrators to be hired in districts with majority White populations eager to diversify the leadership team. However, even when the student population is "majority minority," the staff is typically majority White. In such situations, minority leaders are likely to be pressured to fulfill a role that Moore (2013) describes as "race specialist," in which the leader is expected to focus on the issues of a particular racial group of students. Nelson's (2019) study of the different experiences of Black and White teachers hired in majority-White and majority-Black schools exposed the ways that informal social ties influence both hiring and the socialization and connections necessary for flourishing in a new position. Though this research was on teachers, there is little to suggest the patterns do not hold true for administrators, and likely with even greater effect.

Most research on minority school leaders examines the experiences of Hispanic and African-American leaders, but the experience of Asian-American administrators is largely ignored (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017). This overlooks the fact that unique challenges of culture, history, gender, and public perceptions of Asian Americans as America's "model minority" (Peterson,1966) adds complexity and stressors to these leaders.

Educational leadership challenges faced by women in our current cultural context have been the subject of substantial recent research (e.g., Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010), and the findings reveal a consistent experience of stressors and pressures piled on top of what is experienced by male school administrators. As one veteran leader put it,

> I've been a woman who pretty much throughout my professional career has not played the gender discrimination card, I just haven't. I've felt well-received and I've risen to an outstanding place. But when I see truly what's going on here…there's no question in my mind that I've been discriminated against, whether intentionally or not. And I've seen plenty of my female colleagues go down the path they didn't want to go because they

> have been railroaded one way or another because people treat women differently. They would never pull some of this crap if it was a man. (Wyland, 2016, p. 59)

An impressive number of dissertation studies address these unique challenges faced by women (e.g.: Alpern, 2016; Bartling, 2013; Burns, 2009; Henderson, 2017; Jones, 2016; Melvin, 2019; Morillo, 2017; Mortensen, 2019; Odum, 2010; Parker, 2015; Schiele, 2012; Sweat, 2020), and specifically women of color (e.g.: Isaacs, 2012; Johnson; 2018; Morillo, 2017; Sandoval, 2019; Schiele, 2012; Smith, 2011), and they provide insights into the ways these factors add to the personal toll of leadership. Consistent with this observation, 79% of the studies included in Lomotey's (2018) review of research on Black women principals from 1993 to 2017, three-fourths were dissertations. Narratives of the experience of women leaders are particularly insightful, and several such studies will now be discussed.

Eckman (2004) found that male principals are more likely to be married and have children, and are more likely to have children still living at home. On average, men attain their first principalship quicker and at a younger age than women, having taught fewer years in the classroom. The female high school principals in Eckman's study expressed significantly higher levels of conflict than males in the areas of time for social commitments, household management issues, and the ability to fulfill aspirations. In a male-dominated field, women leaders report heightened emotional burdens as compared with men when expected to conform with performative norms that value emotional distancing (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015).

A study of women in top educational leadership roles in Florida (McGee, 2010) described career and life decision-making pressures and compromising by women rarely experienced by men. This included delaying entrance into administration in order to prioritize child-raising, extending planning and preparation in order to be a stronger candidate, and shouldering family

responsibilities that hinder the level of mobility and networking men enjoy that limits professional opportunities, and—once hired—isolation in the role due to gender.

Life role conflict is a consistent finding in the research on women leaders, especially those with young children at home (Loder, 2005). For example, in their study of early career women administrators, Loder and Spillane (2005) explored the conflict these leaders faced when they shifted from the role of caring teacher centered on the relational context of a classroom to the role of administrator, which involves a systemic context of multiple internal and external stakeholders and a changed relationship with teachers who shift from being peers to being subordinates. The authors called for similar studies of men to find out if there is a gender-based difference, but their speculation was that such a difference exists, especially among women who are long-time teachers and are selected for mid- to later-career moves into administration.

It is important to point out that the challenge of work-life balance is ubiquitous among school administrators, both women and men, and it is a struggle that is unique to each individual and it's a constantly shifting battle. For each school leader, aspirations evolve, skills and understandings develop, and expectations and contextual factors change, both at home and at work. Therefore, qualitative studies are helpful in appreciating the complexity of each case. For example, Zeeck's (2012) study of eight elementary principals from the Midwest in two-career families with children is a rich dive into the tension lived day to day as leaders seek to be excellent at home and at work and fall short as the demands pile up. And yet, the research also consistently reports how these work-life balance challenges are experienced more acutely by women in a culture that continues to expect more from women than men at home. Studies such as White's (2017) investigation of the work-family balance of women superintendents spotlight a

negotiation of unreasonable work role expectations with homelife by women rarely experienced with the same intensity by men in the same role.

There are added burdens for women who serve as superintendents as compared to their male counterparts (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009). Women superintendents experience pervasive sexism, which manifests as: difficulty accessing informal "networks"; overcoming bias in determining "fit" in hiring; and gender role expectations. These job-based challenges are accompanied by the work-life pressures of family obligations, lack of mobility, and childcare issues (Olsen, 2007). An extensive study of executive level administrators in the province of Manitoba (Wallin, 2009) found that gender "shaped the experiences of men and women, particularly in terms of family responsibilities and personal life balance, access to the superintendency, experiential background, the nature of the roles men and women are expected to take on within senior administration, and the granting of legitimacy and credibility in leadership" (p. 2).

Robinson and Shakeshaft (2015) reported two themes from their study of women who left the superintendency for other career options. First was the mismatch between the mission to improve teaching and learning and the actual job superintendents are forced to do, which is dominated by budgets and board politics. Second was the exhaustion brought on by the work, which featured impossible expectations from stakeholders and the school board. As one participant observed, "I realize I brought these 80-hour work weeks on myself but I truly believe it takes that amount of time to do the job as it should be done" (p. 58). The desire to excel in all life roles caused these leaders to strive to be a "superwoman," which was attempted against sexist headwinds and with a sense of obligation not to quit and thereby disappoint other women aspiring to be superintendents.

Hawk and Martin (2011) also found gender differences in the experience of stress among superintendents and the coping strategies utilized. For example, while both men and women superintendents experienced the need to hide their stress, they did so for different reasons. For men, pride was the key. One male participant shared, “I don’t feel I can tell anyone that I am stressed, which I guess is a male thing” (p. 373). For women, the issue was fear of being seen as weak. A female participant admitted, “I feel that I cannot show stress because it would be seen as a sign of weakness in a female administrator” (p. 373). In their study of the role of emotions in the work of principals, Berkovich and Eyal (2015) noted another gender difference in leadership. As a male-dominated profession, school administration typically features a degree of emotional distancing, especially when dealing with tough issues and decisions, and women reported heightened emotional burdens when expected to conform with that performative norm.

Research to identify challenges experienced and resilience strategies among female superintendents in New York and Georgia (Polka, Litchka, & Davis, 2008) provided another indicator that the role can be more challenging for women than it is for men in our current social context. The authors noted that both male and female superintendents experienced what they termed the "professional victim syndrome." The syndrome is defined as the experience of “a career crisis in which [the superintendent’s] professional and personal reputation was being tarnished, and he/she had the challenge of navigating the political waves in order to survive, literally and figuratively, as a leader and a person” (p. 296). Though all superintendents are vulnerable to such a challenge, it is asserted that “the impact on the individual female superintendent's personal and professional lives including relationships with their family, friends and colleagues may be more intense and longer lasting” (p. 297), and the authors suggest that

professional networks for women may not be as well developed as they are for men, thus limiting an important resources in such times.

According to Witherspoon and Taylor (2010), "The research on females leading in education is slim, and our knowledge of women of color leading is even thinner" (p. 154). The unique experience of each Latina leader in the research of Martinez, Rivera, and Marquez (2020) highlights the importance of viewing each person's story as unique, and numerous recent dissertations offer robust narratives of the experience of women of color serving as school leaders, offering first-hand accounts of what these leaders encounter day to day (e.g.: Isaacs, 2012; Johnson; 2018; Morillo, 2017; Sandoval, 2019; Schiele, 2012; Smith, 2011). Nevertheless, the commonalities identified by Martinez and her colleagues (gender role expectations, mentorship, racism, sexism, and bilingualism) point to both the shared experience of all women leaders and that which is distinctive to the Latina experience.

African-American women serving as superintendents are a minority within a minority within a minority, and though it certainly is limited, there has been quality research conducted. The consistent findings portray a number of challenges, some shared with all school leaders, some with fellow women in leadership, some with fellow superintendents, and some with male African-American leaders, but some unique to African-American women in the superintendent role. For example, Alston (2005), based on the research available, characterized Black women superintendents as servant leaders who practiced a form of "tempered radicalism" (Meyerson, 2001) that incorporated both race and gender. Allen and Hughes (2017) compared generations of female leaders of color in the experience of becoming and being superintendents, and detailed the shifts in the cultural contexts, opportunities, barriers, and perspectives of veteran and aspiring school leaders.

First Year Administrators

A great deal of attention in research and in the field has been directed at those who are new to a position, especially first year assistant principals, principals, and superintendents. The move from the classroom to administration is particularly stressful. An assistant principal's reflection on her entrance into administration offers a poignant example:

> I wish my heart had been harder—you know, don't take it personally. I wish I knew that I wasn't going to be able to have time to have lunch with my friends. I wish I knew that the most difficult part of the job was going to be the adult rather than the kid piece. I wish I knew that I didn't have to carry the entire world on my shoulders and that I could say, "It's not my job. I don't have to solve everything." I wish I knew that everybody in the world sees it differently than I do, and my expectations perhaps shouldn't be as high. I wish I knew it was OK to ask for help. (Armstrong, 2010, p. 686)

A new elementary principal echoed the difficulty in her own experience as she looked back on her first year in the principalship:

> I always said that if I become an administrator, I would not have teachers overburdened with supervising the halls, cafeteria, and playground. So, I did all of that for them. I also wanted everybody to like me. I couldn't understand how I could do all of these things, and there was always a teacher who was never satisfied. I was really upset by that. I also took on the personal problems of the staff. At the beginning, I didn't see a problem because I wanted to be compassionate. I wanted teachers to bring their personal problems to me. I gave advice, went to their homes, took them dinner…and then the problems began. Word spread. Teachers were calling me at home. I no longer had time for my own family. I soon learned some important lessons: not everyone would like me or agree with my decisions, and not all of the problems belonged to me. (Brock & Grady, 2002, p. 13)

An administrator's first job usually comes with a dose of professional "hazing" from teaching peers, often featuring jokes about going "to the dark side." Distancing, isolation, and negative changes in relationships with peers are experienced by many when promoted from the

teaching ranks to administration (Nichols & McBride, 2017). Being promoted to an administrative role in a school where the leader taught can bring a bit more of this teasing, and, more significantly, includes the discomfort of engaging in conflict and evaluation processes with former colleagues and friends, (Workman, 2013). It can have advantages as well, especially if an assistant principal moves up to the principalship (Spillane & Lee, 2014).

Whether promoted from within or hired in a new context, the shift from teaching to administration is a profound professional and personal change. Hohner and Riveros (2017) studied teacher leaders who transitioned into administrative roles and observed that the novices had to "face a new sense of reality" and "build a new identity, often in a new school away from former teaching colleagues," (p. 47). According to Armstrong (2004), "Crossing the boundary between teaching and administration forces individuals to adopt roles and perspectives that destabilize their emotional, cognitive and ideological bases and provokes a range of conflicting emotions due to the tensions inherent in leadership and management" (p. 2).

Transitions into new administrative roles come with unique challenges and stressors, but all are subject to the differing public perceptions of teachers—which is generally positive—to that of school administrators—which is generally negative. Teachers are often heroes in popular portrayals, and most people have stories about a favorite teacher from their schooling experience. However, the views of most members of the public regarding administrators are shaped by personal experience and popular media. The personal experience most people have with administrators while a student is likely negative: disciplinary action, supervision in the halls, watching for misbehavior at school events, etc. Some may have encountered administrators in conflicts over policies or practice where the administrator held the power. Also negative is the

popular media portrayal of school leaders, which has been the object of limited research which reveals a cultural frame that reinforces many of those early negative perceptions.

Rousmaniere's (2015) account of the transformation of popular media images of principals centered on the role of gender in that process. Of the current status of administrators in media, she observed, "Popular images of twenty-first-century principals resemble their peers half a century earlier: a weak-willed, suspiciously unethical, and notably unmasculine male figure who leads schools that remain mired in old-fashioned power battles" (p. 212). In a study of how principals are portrayed in recent films (Wolfram, 2010), about 80% were depicted negatively. Nearly a third were bureaucrats who were not engaged in their work, humorless, and obsessed with rules and regulations. About a quarter were autocrats who ruled by intimidation. About another quarter were either "buffoons"—principals out of touch with kids, incompetent, and the object of student mockery—or "villains"—principals who were involved in corruption and often victimized those they were to be serving. Rousmaniere's analysis aligns with the slant of those stereotyped images, adding, "Given the derisive portrayals of school leadership that we see in popular media, it is a miracle that Americans support public education at all" (p. 213).

That negativity is often focused on the secondary vice principal, which is a common first step for administrators. Bush (2018) laments the shift in the function of the assistant principalship from an apprenticeship in school leadership to a narrower, role-bound job, often dominated by student management responsibilities. That focus on discipline is also reflected in the vice principal as the common enemy in many films that target teenage audiences, which adds a challenge for those idealistic, energetic apprentices who take their first administrative position eager to make a difference in the lives of children. As the research details, these novices typically find that the job is not what they expected. In a study of the initial experiences of first year

assistant principals (Armstrong, 2010), participants used metaphors such as "sink or swim," "jumping off the deep end," "swimming against the tide," and "baptism by fire" (Bush, p. 701). New assistant principals in another study (Murdock, 2018) also used the terms "baptism by fire" and "trial by fire." In that study, "many participants acknowledged their preexisting thoughts and beliefs of the job did not mirror the complexity, demands, and requirements of the position" (p. 121). Feelings of "shock," sadness," and "surprise" were expressed when they had "the unexpected realization of the day-to-day reality of the position" (p. 121). Along with isolation and workload, the unpredictability is frequently noted by novice administrators. One observed, "At the drop of a hat, anything can take place and you have to be able to respond to those things, and respond in a very effective manner" (Workman, p. 147).

The deep desire to please the supervisor, combined with efforts to "fit in" with fellow administrators, places a great deal of pressure on the novice leader as they are socialized into the organization and the profession (Mertz, 2006). Armstrong (2010) asserts that the common assistant principal "rights of passage" are experienced uniquely, based upon variations in the individual and contextual factors, but significant consistencies exist as well. Armstrong found that as soon as teachers indicated an interest in administration, the rites of passage began, and that signaled the beginning of "a complex psychosocial journey that, over time forced the novices to reject their teacher values and beliefs and realign themselves with managerial and administrative goals" (p. 696).

Most assistant principals are both supervised and mentored—informally if not formally—by the building principal they serve. The power differential is obvious, and because of this, Armstrong (2015) argues that "how to navigate their relationship with the principal in order to access power and fulfill their leadership aspirations" (p. 119). Unfortunately, a less than positive relationship is not unusual. Some of the first-year vice principals studied by Murdock (2018) experienced "frustration and in some cases anger with the lack of a healthy, productive

professional relationship with the principal" (p. 93). If the principal restricts the experience of the assistant principal or fails to guide the novice in preparation for next steps, the career of the assistant principal is likely to be stunted.

Even if the supervising principal is an excellent mentor and advocate, novice administrators are typically socialized exclusively into the prevailing culture of their organization, missing out on the richness of learning from other districts and systems. Models intended to cross organizational borders by offering mentoring from principals in other schools or districts, or retired administrators, run the risk of passive or active antagonism from the novice's supervising principal. Since that relationship is vital to the professional success of the assistant principal, all these considerations carry significant weight in discerning the best approach to professional development.

Though many school administrators begin their careers as assistant principals and it is in that role where administrative socialization typically takes place, the focus of research has been on principals, and, more recently, superintendents. Consistent with the experience of first year assistant principals, first year principals and superintendents are often surprised by what their new role demands of them (Armstrong et al, 2014; Bauer & Brazer, 2013; Fields, 2005; Hobson, Brown, Ashby, Keys, Sharp, & Benefield, 2003; Kowalski, Petersen, & Fusarelli, 2009; Moore, 2016; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018; Wildy & Clarke, 2008). Ascendancy to the principalship has been described as a climb to the top of a "greasy pole" (Walker & Qian, 2006) and yet,

> As hard as it is to get there, however…the slipping, sliding and uncertainty associated with scaling the pole certainly does not end when the name is nailed to the new office door. The rigors involved in the climb not only continue but actually accentuate during the first few years of the principalship… In too many cases, the experience of the climb

> has done little to prepare beginning principals for the balancing act they are asked to perform. (p. 297)

First year principals commonly "feel 'bowled over' by the rush of work and the concern over balancing this with growing demands of accountability" (Walker & Qian, p. 302), and this holds true not just in the United States, but internationally. According to Clarke and Wildy (2013), researching Australian administrators, "the level of personal resilience required to deal with the complexities of school leadership is widely underestimated by principals, especially when they are novices" (p. 37). Part of the job is to discern what the job requires, and this is an added stress. It is not as simple as attending to the official list of duties. As Bush (2018) explains, "Beginning principals essentially make sense of their roles by themselves or by using informal feedback from teachers, students, parents, and other administrators" (p. 312). As the year unfolds, the novice learns on the job, encountering systems and situations, and figuring out what to do, and what not to do, and how to do it. Each journey is unique. As Walker and Qian (2006) explain, "each critical incident beginning principals face is different because each person, each school and each district has its own personality and approach to a challenge," which is why, Walker and Qian continue, there is no "playbook for rookies" (p. 303).

Though it is often assumed that leading an elementary school is a less complex challenge, first year elementary principals experience a "reality shock" as they recognize the immensity of the responsibilities that come with the role, face the massive workload and the range of responsibilities, and deal with the unpredictability that is characteristic of the day-to-day reality in their new positions (Spillane & Lee, 2014). With the "reality shock" comes "increased stress, a constant alertness to what might go wrong, and an inability to leave the job behind even on weekends," which is evident in physical and emotional symptoms: "sleep loss, physical exhaustion, frustration, nervousness, and constant worrying" (p. 444). About half of the

principals studied experienced solitariness and loneliness, which the researchers attributed primarily to the "novice principals' sense that they were ultimately and solely responsible for critical school decisions" (p. 445).

The patterns repeat in studies of the experiences of first year superintendents, but with increased responsibilities and visibility, there were implications that were not clear to the novices until they actually began the work. Not surprisingly, every leader's story is unique, as Isernhagen and Bulkin's (2013) study of the very different experiences of two first year female superintendents in similar districts attests, but one common unanticipated aspect of the experience is the personal toll. Sutton's (2012) study detailed "the substantial personal costs that incoming superintendents associate with their professional roles" (p. 196). The effects were troubling: "Participants described risks to their physical health, emotional and psychological harm, threats to family relationships, the loss of personal identity and a sense of personal privacy, grief and regret, and other personal sacrifices" (p. 196).

The superintendents, for the most part, did not find strategies to mediate the stressors of the work. Instead, they accepted these costs as part of the job, "driven by a desire to maintain what they considered to be an illusion of perfection held by their school boards," because they "believed that their boards had, by selecting them to fill the position, placed them on a sort of pedestal and regarded them, albeit unrealistically, with a sense of perfection. Rather than risk shattering that perception and disappointing their school boards, they simply submitted quietly to significant personal sacrifices" (Sutton, p. 197).

Charter & Online School Leaders

The shift to a schooling marketplace approach (Abrams, 2016) has made expanded choice and efficiency central objectives in policy. The rapid expansion of both online options

and charter schools is evidence of this movement. Public charter schools grew from two percent of all US public schools in the 2000-01 school year to seven percent in the 2016–17 school year (McFarland, Hussar, Zhang, Wang, X., Wang, K., Diliberti, Cataldi, Mann, & Barmer, 2019), and fully online schools have grown from a negligible presence in 2000 the current situation, which features approximately 300,000 students enrolled in such programs (Molnar, Miron, Elgeberi, Barbour, Huerta, Shafer, & Rice, 2019). The two categories overlap significantly, since many virtual schools are charters, and the total student enrollment in virtual charters makes up nearly eighty percent of the nation's virtual schooling population. Given these trends, it is important to consider the difference in the experiences of those leading in these schools as compared to more traditional contexts.

Foreman and Moranto (2018) explored the perspectives of nine charter school principals who had served previously as principals in public schools. Along with the flexibility and freedoms that come with most charter schools, these principals noted the added stress of business tasks that had been handled by the district office in their public school experience, but now were theirs to complete under the shadow of intensified accountability as a stand-alone program. Leaders in charter schools are typically motivated by the mission and vision that sparked the creation of the school, and many charter school administrators come directly from the teaching ranks and have a strong commitment to the success of the endeavor. This is demonstrated by the willingness to work long hours (Torres, 2018). The intensity of the work makes heavy demands on leaders. At times, this can be exhilarating; it can also lead to exhaustion and burnout. There are indications of some toxicity in the experience for many, since principals who exit those contexts often leave school leadership altogether rather than move on to a "next step" administrative role in their careers (Ni, Sun, & Rorrer, 2015).

Online schooling formats can be represented on a continuum that runs from the use of online offerings of specific courses as a program feature in a traditional school to full-time virtual schools. Blended schooling falls between these two extremes. Here we will focus on fully online schools, and research indicates that the challenge of leading a fully online school mirrors much of what brick-and-mortar school leaders face, but there are important differences. Richardson, LaFrance, and Beck (2015) identified the top stressors for online school leaders as funding, staffing, accountability, time, parent and family involvement, and professional development, all of which are common issues for all school leaders. However, these challenges came with a twist added in the online school.

For example, funding stressors for online leaders are often created by an allocation model designed for the needs of traditional schools. In addition, online school leaders assume much of the burden of "translating" the needs of online schooling to fiscal agents unfamiliar with the model who often assume online education is "cheaper" than brick-and-mortar schooling (Richardson, et al, 2015). Also, virtual schools typically operate year-round and the leader is expected to be available to all stakeholders throughout, making work-life boundaries very difficult to establish (Richardson, et al, 2015). Of course, communication and conflict with staff and parents in a fully electronic mode and often with students scattered across a much wider geographic "attendance area"—sometimes international in scope—adds challenges to an already difficult aspect of leadership.

The online environment complicates the ever-present tension administrators face of being both instructional leader and evaluator. Classroom "presence" is quite different in online learning, and the relationship-building that is essential is more complex, requiring skills and understandings that are not standard in administrator preparation programs. Quilici and Joki

(2011) examined the challenge of being an instructional leader in an online school. They observed, “Online principals increasingly need to be more innovative to help lead and guide this new expanding territory,” and they went on to assert that, “Online principals cannot simply demand innovation from their teachers…they have to lead the innovation. Online principals also have to know about online learning, they have to be invested in online learning, and they have to guide their teachers to adapt and change” (p. 155).

Gustafson’s (2019) study of online administrators validated the findings of Richardson, LaFrance, and Beck, and identified a number of additional challenges. Most prominent was student social-emotional well-being. This stressor was acknowledged by over half of the participants, and the recent dramatic rise of this challenge was commented upon. Again, the challenges of increasing social and emotional needs of students is evident in schools everywhere, but online programs serve as a refuge for many students with acute social-emotional needs leaving brick-and-mortar schools. As noted by one of the participants: “So many of these students are not fitting in over there [traditional high schools]. These kids are truly suffering from things like social anxiety and other health issues. But they find opportunity here with us. It doesn’t make it easy, but we know we have to do this for them” (p. 73).

Along with fully online schools, blended options are also growing, and most school districts now incorporate some elements of blended programming into the system. The sudden and massive shift from face-to-face teaching and learning to online formats in response to the COVID-19 pandemic altered educational practice, but the actual long-term change that results is difficult to anticipate. Regardless, the pandemic forced teachers and students into fully online experiences and that experience is likely to add pressure on leaders to guide schools with new insight and understanding concerning virtual schooling options.

Private & Parochial School Leaders

Public schools have fallen from the prominent place they once occupied at the heart of the common vision of America. In the mid-1990s, the Kettering Foundation posed the question, "Is there a public for public schools?" (Mathews, 1996), and the research at that point indicated that, "Despite a long tradition of support for public education, Americans today seem to be halfway out the schoolhouse door" (p. 2). The privileged status of public schools has continued to erode as a market-driven reformation of policy and practice has grown. However, some wariness concerning non-public schooling options still lingers.

In the history of the United States, the growth of public education was fueled at least in part by a belief that schools with children from all walks of life would promote the strength of American democracy and the egalitarian ethos upon which the nation was conceived. Of course, private education has always been an option for families of means, and for the wealthiest, sending children to high quality private schools has been common.

Public schools incorporated—to varying degrees—a sort of "pan-Protestantism" which kept the wind in the sails of America's civil religion, and a central theme for many has been the narrative of America as a uniquely God-ordained nation (Bankston & Caldas, 2009). At the same time, what was called "sectarianism" (Christian "denominationalism" would be more accurate) was shunned in the schoolhouse since pan-Protestantism was intended to unite, while sectarianism was assumed to divide. Faith based schools were viewed as sectarian and, therefore, "un-American" by promoting division. Historically, such schools were organized by religious immigrant communities that sought to retain their language and culture, adding to the sense that these enterprises worked against the "melting pot" cultural vision of America. Of course, Catholic schools suffered more than the rest due to the rampant anti-Catholicism that has

long-infected the United States based largely on reactions to the waves of Catholic immigrants from southern Europe and fear that ultimate loyalty among Catholics belonged to the Pope rather than America. The core goal of American schooling in the wake of that influx of immigrants was to "Americanize" the foreigners (Bankston & Caldas, 2009).

The cultural attitudes towards non-public schooling have shifted dramatically over time, especially among White Christians. Support for the Blaine Amendment (1875), which would have prohibited states from providing financial assistance to religiously affiliated schools (see Klinkhamer, 1956), had broad support among White Christians. The effort was not successful, but most states adopted laws that yielded the desired result (Green, 2018). That stance has shifted, as evidenced by efforts to redirect public education dollars to private schools that have the robust support of White Evangelical Christians (Bordelon, 2018).

The logic behind market-based reformation justifies this shift with a narrative of public school failure and a confidence in the power of competition to deliver the change and improvement many believe the public school monopoly has been unable to achieve (Lubienski, 2005). The result is an increasing demand for "choice" of various stripes, both within and beyond public systems. According to Belfield and Levin (2005) at the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education (NCSPE) at Teachers College, Columbia University, the opposing voices in this ongoing conflict over school choice demonstrate that "strong belief seems to underlie these opinions rather than clear facts" (p. 2). Evidence of that viewpoint is provided by Belfield and Levin themselves, in that their summary of what is known about school choice is that, "The evidence is neither unequivocal nor clearly persuasive on either side" (p.2), while Walberg (2007) of the libertarian Cato Institute concluded his extensive review of the

available evidence with the claim that, “It may be confidently concluded that school choice generally works better than public school monopolies” (p. 109).

While the long-standing disagreements among Americans regarding non-public schooling remain, much of the rancor and violence that accompanied this conflict in the past has abated. A concurrent growth in discontent with public education has cast an elongating shadow of doubt over public schools and put pressure on all choice programs to provide evidence of success and produce outcomes that exceed those of public schools. The burdens are shouldered primarily by the school administrators.

Along with public attitudes to navigate, many of the stressors private school leaders face are similar to what public school administrators confront (Carden, 1999), but there are important differences. For example, working with governing boards (and sometimes clergy) adds a political and relational power dynamic and generates conflicts that public school principals do not typically experience (Barisano, 2017; Carden, 1999; Cookson & Smith, 2011; Ledesma, 2014). An exception might be rural principals who also function as a superintendent/principal. Similarly, the tight connection with a community that is part of the private school leadership experience can be both a blessing and a curse, especially when the school is part of a local church, is well known to small-town and rural principals in public schools.

While the trend towards choice has made school marketing a growing responsibility for public school administrators, enrollments and donations are the lifeblood of private schools and marketing has always been central to the leader’s role. Since public schools are the functional default choice for families, private school administrators must be successful promoters of the school and they must make a strong case regarding the moral and/or academic superiority of their school to justify tuition payments from prospective families. Martin (2018) observed that

"in private school settings where parents pay tuition, keeping the 'consumer' satisfied may set priority on how principals choose to spend their time" (p. 177), and went on to consider how athletic success for high school level private school programs enhances the school's visibility and image, which aids in student recruitment. For all parochial school leaders, marketing and growing competition—especially from online schooling options—has added to the intensity of this stressor (Swaner & Mecham, 2017).

One responsibility of faith-based school leaders that is not part of the work of public school or non-parochial private school administrators is spiritual leader. Leaders in all variety of faith schools are expected to provide guidance and foster faith development for students, staff, and families (Banke, Maldonado, & Lacey, 2012; Barisano, 2017; Boyle, Haller, & Hunt, 2016; Scott & McNeish, 2012; Spesia, 2016; Wallace, Ridenour, & Biddle, 1999). The nature of the specific aspects of this expectation varies based upon the faith community and the context, but leaders often feel poorly equipped and supported in this role (Barisano, 2017), and for many, the responsibility has become far more challenging as the beliefs and religious practices of parents are less tightly aligned to what is taught and practiced at school (Barisano, 2017; Swaner & Mecham, 2017). Parochial school leaders typically have to juggle questions of doctrine as they serve families from a variety of religious traditions, though there is considerable variation in how this plays out in different settings. For example, in independent Christian schools, this challenge typically leads to avoidance of the very distinctives that fueled the creation of many Protestant denominations in the United States. That is mirrored in Christian school curriculum publishers, who must maintain broad appeal across denominational lines. This has resulted in what Wagner (1997) described as "a kind of 'generic' panconservative Christianity, with some of the corners of historical doctrinal differences rounded down" (p. 14).

The ambivalence in America concerning public vs. private schooling turns to dissension when it comes to religious schools; even religious Americans are conflicted when it comes to faith-based schools (e.g. Glanzer, 2009). This is not unique to the United States. Sullivan (2009) explains that internationally, "The existence of faith schools is controversial, not only with non-believers, but also among believers. Thus, some religious believers support the existence of faith schools, while others do not. Some non-believers support the existence of faith schools, while others do not" (p. 937). Much of the conflict is generated from the long-standing challenges of navigating the church-state issues, but a second source of conflict for faith schools is the unique role of religion in the United States. Historically, the lack of an official state religion has caused faiths to compete for followers, which has often caused Protestant churches—which have been the dominant religious bodies—to emphasize differences. That experience is now combined with the intense individualism of American culture and the personal choice approach to faith commitments, and church school leaders must find ways to remain faithful to whatever faith community (formal or informal) birthed and sustains them, and maintain an adequate enrollment. Each school's relationship with the faith community it serves can be anywhere on "a whole spectrum of degrees of affiliation, ownership and direction" (Sullivan, p. 938). Similarly, the operation of the school and the successful achievement targets for students must be responsive to expectations and requirements external to the school, and what that entails varies widely from school to school, and is a moving target at best. Both relationships can be fraught with conflict.

Parochial school leadership is further complicated by the "dual identity" inherent to religious schooling. Such schools are an extension of the religious community they serve, and they are also part of both the local community where they are located and the larger culture.

Sullivan (2009) describes the ongoing challenge to balance "between the promotion of a distinctive culture within a faith school and the degree of accommodation or resistance to the culture that prevails outside of it," (p. 946). The duality is most evident in the essential question of purpose, where faith and academics are both important. Based upon their review of research, Scott and McNeish (2012) pointed to this core challenge of maintaining "distinctiveness as a faith school," which involves "retaining the school's religious character, sometimes challenging secular values and balancing the two priorities of educational attainment and moral and spiritual development" (p. 11).

Achieving quality in both spheres is daunting. Assuring stakeholders of success in the mission and, at the same, providing evidence of quality to convince potential new students to enroll is even more challenging. A recent project by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) is a logical response, and it provides a Christian school version of quality frameworks in use in other contexts (Swaner, Marshall, & Tesar, 2019). The ACSI goal is to articulate a vision for "flourishing" in Christian schools and provide tools for school self-assessment to guide improvement. The overall model is constituted by five "domains" that are fleshed out through a number of "constructs" (goals or outcomes), and evaluations are intended to give schools an indication of where "flourishing" is lacking. Though the project is impressive in scope and aspiration, the unintended consequence for leaders is likely to be a new level of accountability that goes beyond academics to include spiritual outcomes. Academic assessment is quite difficult, and the dominance of test scores can easily mask and distort the reality. To assess faith outcomes (e.g., spiritual formation, prosocial orientation, etc.) in a meaningful way will far exceed the academic assessment challenge. Efforts to translate

assessment results into action planning will be problematic, and that challenge, along with any other issues that emerge, will fall to the leader to address.

Faith is paramount in these schools, and this is typically unambiguously communicated. Martin (2018) captured this prioritization, observing that "Christian schoolteachers hope their graduates will live out their faith example to society, supported by their Christian school academic training that includes being taught from a biblical worldview, and principals are the ultimate stewards of this mission" (p. 178). It is similar in Catholic schools. Since the goal is "to teach students to receive Jesus and live out His call to create the Kingdom of God on earth…it is imperative that Catholic school principals be strong instructional leaders, [but] it is just as important that these principals are strong in faith leadership" (Boyle, Haller, & Hunt, 2016, p. 299). Barisano (2017) made a similar observation: "The role of spiritual leadership is not separate from, but integrated into other leadership roles and responsibilities of the Catholic elementary principal" (p. 112). An added challenge for some faith school leaders is a community expectation that students be trained as the "tip of the spear" in cultural engagement, training to be the vanguard of the faith's bold engagement with an often-antagonistic culture to evangelize and influence society. This is most often associated with evangelical and fundamentalist Christian schools, but the New Evangelization movement among Catholics promotes similar outcomes for Catholic schools (Spesia, 2016).

The difficulty of staffing a school where teachers are expected to be faith leaders and quality academic instructors, typically for lower pay than public school peers, is a constant stress for most faith school principals. Concerns about the changing beliefs in younger evangelicals that often do not align with the belief statements of schools are on the rise. In Catholic schools, the changes in staffing have led to a situation where lay teachers and leaders have become the

vast majority over the past few decades. This has been a particular point of anxiety in Catholic educational circles (Boyle, Haller, & Hunt, 2016). Wallace, Ridenour, and Biddle worried in 1999, "The dramatic shift from religious to lay personnel raises the question of whether or not some Catholic schools might become academic private schools with a religious memory but a secular presence" (p. 107). That concern has not diminished. The issue is most prominent at the high school level where academic expertise is prized and non-Catholic teachers can be found.

Grace (2009) argued that assumptions made about faith-based schools, such as the belief that such schools lead to community and social divisiveness, and that indoctrination is the goal rather than education, are unsubstantiated by research to date. Nevertheless, assumptions and stereotypes are significant culture forces. Similarly, public understanding of non-religious private schools is also shaped by assumptions and stereotypes, so leaders in both settings are likely to encounter the negative effects of these beliefs and biases.

For some, the historical White reaction to school integration efforts taints the image of Christian schooling today. Though the growth of the Christian school movement in the United States in the second half of the 20th Century had many causes (Slater, 2019), the proliferation of private White academies in the South as part of the "massive resistance" to the Brown v Board of Education Supreme Court ruling that required school desegregation and integration more broadly has generated significant scholarly attention (e.g., Webb, 2005). Many "White Flight Academies" were Christian schools, and others that were not overtly Christian were supported by Christians as what was viewed by the majority of White Christians in numerous communities as a necessary alternative to integrated public schools (Newman, 1996). The American cultural legacy of White Christian support for the institution of slavery and Jim Crow laws (Haynes, 2002), support of the Ku Klux Klan (Baker, 2011), and continuing failure to view racial

disparities as both systemic injustice and individual sin (Emerson & Smith, 2001) combine to shape the perspective of many who view conservative Christians and Christian schools as fundamentally racist and the historical fruit of racism.

Zockoll (2019) explored the lack of Black leadership in an association of Christian schools with a significant minority enrollment, including two minority-majority schools. Participants articulated the views that color does not matter since common faith eliminates difference, and that Christian harmony is the priority. One leader stated, "We should be more concerned with the person's faith and walk with Christ than the color of his skin" (p. 156). Another explained (emphasis in original):

> Since our school's mission is to educate children from a Christ-centered perspective, I would strongly disagree that racial DIVERSITY is KEY to accomplishing that mission. However, I would strongly agree that racial HARMONY is key. (Zockoll, pp. 156-7)

Zockoll's findings detail the discriminatory practices that resulted from this "color-blind racism" that was considered an expression of "faithfulness."

The persistent dominance of whiteness in evangelical institutions, the functional segregation of most churches, and the close alignment of White evangelicalism with the Republican Party and conservative policies concerning racial inequity serve as confirming indicators for many that White Christians retain a racist core. This is a simmering social stigma for leaders of Christian schools.

All of these issues add complexity and challenge on top of many of the stressors common to school leaders in public settings. Even among faith school leaders who achieve long tenures at a particular school, the challenges of the work are acute. Ledesma (2014) identified common stressors among these successful administrators: political pressures and conflict with local church pastors and school board members, finances, staffing and other personnel issues, lack of

time and lack of privacy. The work-life balance challenge was paramount, and Ledesma uncovered "the belief that it is acceptable to lead imbalanced lives for the sake of educational ministry" (p. 41)

Conclusion

School leadership is demanding and important work, and stress is a constant, as it is for all who lead in any context, and some find even high levels of stress as invigorating. And while "good stress"--or *eustress*--is a normal way for the body to respond to challenges, this paper has presented research on the common experience of "bad stress"--or *distress*--where leaders' well-being is eroded and performance is diminished and which can lead to burnout. As has been detailed, some face additional burdens based upon gender, race, role, and location. This is evident not only in school leaders serving in all types of schools, public and private, in the United States, but in countries around the world.

An intensification in work demands made on school leaders has come in the midst of the recent shift to an educational marketplace and increased public scrutiny regarding success metrics that ramp up accountability for administrators, all at a time when relational and collaborative leadership are prized. These factors have added significantly to the emotional labor of leadership, and the isolation that typically accompanies leadership leaves most administrators to fend for themselves when it comes to stress management and self-care. Workaholism and burnout are often the result.

Truly, educational leadership is not for the faint of heart, however each administrator is unique and each setting is unique, so blanket assumptions about the experience of all school leaders is inappropriate. Since the stressfulness of the role is a constant, understanding the nature of the challenge is essential in order to promote positive actions that foster resilience and

increase the sustainability of leaders. This review of the research is intended to inform that crucial effort.

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