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Be you: an ethnographic research study of a first-year assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
WHEELLOCK COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Dissertation

**BE YOU:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH STUDY OF A FIRST-YEAR
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL IN AN URBAN PK–8 SCHOOL**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

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Sometimes you have to not just dream about what could be—you get out and push, and you pull, and you preach. And you create a climate and environment to get those in high places, to get men and women of goodwill in power to act. . . . Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.

—John R. Lewis

My wish for you—no matter where your journey leads—is for you to always . . . Be silly. Be odd. Be unique. Be weird. Be Colorful. Be okay with being different. Be just the way you are. . . . BE YOU! Be very, very YOU!

—Peter H. Reynolds

Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better . . . People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

—Marguerite A. Johnson

You're every line, you're every word, you're everything.

—Michael S. Bublé

If you can dream it, you can do it.

—Walter E. Disney

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my maternal grandmother, Clara “G-MA” Arnold. She taught me how to write my first thesis-driven essay, supported me in all of my educational endeavors, and built my capacity to always be empathetic; to my maternal grandfather, James “PaPa” Lambert, who instilled in me early on in life “the power of the pen,” and he saw me through the proposal stages of this research study before he could read this final work prior to his passing; to my mother, Maria Chouinard, who taught me that things happen for a reason, what is meant to be will be, and to always be my true authentic self; to my twin sister, Jillian Lynch, who since Day 1, has been my best friend and my protector; to my brother, Keegan Donaher, who has shown me that life experiences also provide learning opportunities; to my father, Patrick Donaher, and my brother-in-law, Mick Lynch, who have supported me during my educational journey; to my nephew, Cashel Lynch, who reaffirms for me on a daily basis to love my family and close friends wholeheartedly; to my role models Adam Martin, Scott Robillard, and Thomas Keating, who have always provided me with endless life coaching, guidance, and support; to my professional mentors Dr. Curtis Bates, Dr. Jill Story, Dr. John Salmon, and the late Liza Crowley, who have all taught me beyond the walls of the schoolhouse, sparked my charisma, and inspired my various journeys to date in the field of education. I am who I am today because of all of you—I would not be here experiencing this moment in the completion of this work without all of your unconditional love and support—I love you all so much!

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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative ethnographic research study, I focused on a first-year assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment and the coaching, mentoring, support, and training needed to develop an effective building administrator who will be retained in the assistant principal position. The guiding research questions included the following: (a) What are an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment? (b) Based on an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what systems and structures might build their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership? and (c) Based on an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what coaching, mentoring, support, and training might improve their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?

The assistant principal position serves as the gateway to a leadership position; however, many assistant principals do not receive the mentorship, training, and coaching they need to succeed. Educational leadership programs have not completely prepared candidates to enter new assistant principal positions. The training at the postsecondary

level helps to prepare candidates to enter leadership roles, but they lack specificity for the assistant principal position. This study's aim was to explain the experiences of an assistant principal in a first-person narrative form and to help new assistant principals understand their roles as well as provide guidance to inform practice.

The three major themes that emerged from the findings of this research study involved: (a) clash of values and expectations; (b) health, safety, and well-being; and (c) personal growth. The researcher learned that being authentic in leadership includes recognizing personal strengths and weaknesses. Situations in which leaders do not professionally reflect on their leadership practices can lead to chaotic, dysfunctional, traumatic, and unhealthy experiences. An assistant principal's health, safety, and well-being should be fostered, and this requires time designated for instructional leadership along with opportunities to build trust and relationships. An individual's ability to serve others is fully compromised when their core values are compromised. Based on this study's findings, new assistant principals need clear communication protocols, expectations, and responsibilities, along with defined systems and structures. A key recommendation from this study, regardless of geographic location, is to provide new assistant principals with a comprehensive multiyear mentoring program to foster a successful transition into the new position.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
ABSTRACT.....	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OVERVIEW	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Contextual Background of District and School	6
Problem of Practice and Research Questions	7
Significance of the Study	8
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	10
Review of Literature Search Process	11
Assistant Principals and their Roles and Responsibilities	11
Monitoring Student Academic Achievement	12
Assistant Principals Providing Instructional Leadership.....	13
Assistant Principals Evaluating Teachers	15
Assistant Principals Maintaining Student Discipline	17
Assistant Principals Supporting Professional Learning.....	18
Assistant Principals Fostering the Whole-Student Development.....	19
Conclusion	20
Assistant Principal Challenges.....	21
Challenges Related to Role Ambiguity	21

Challenges Related to Limited Administrative Authority	23
Challenges Related to Workload	24
Conclusion	25
Professional Development for Assistant Principals	25
Instructional Leadership Development for Assistant Principals.....	26
Professional Learning for Assistant Principals	27
Mentoring and Coaching for Assistant Principals	28
Conclusion	30
Chapter Summary	30
CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN OF THE STUDY	33
Study Methodology.....	34
Study Design.....	35
Setting, Sample, and Population	36
Data Collection	37
Data Analysis	39
Statement of Positionality	40
Trustworthiness.....	41
Chapter Summary	44
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH AND DATA	45
Overview of District and School	48
Overview of Methodology	51
Description of Data Collection and Procedures.....	51
Description of Analysis	52
Presentation of Findings	54

Clash of Values and Expectations	57
Health, Safety, and Well-Being	67
Professional Growth	79
Chapter Summary	90
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	92
Conclusions and Discussion	94
RQ 1: What are an Assistant Principal’s Leadership Experiences in an Urban PK–8 School Environment?	95
RQ 2: Based on an Assistant Principal’s Leadership Experiences in an Urban PK–8 School, What Systems and Structures Might Build Their Leadership Capacity and Outlook on Educational Leadership?	98
RQ 3: Based on an Assistant Principal’s Leadership Experiences in an Urban PK–8 School, What Coaching, Mentoring, Support, and Training Might Improve Their Leadership Capacity and Outlook on Educational Leadership?	101
Summary	104
Implications	105
Recommendations for Practice	107
Recommendations for Future Research	110
Limitations	112
Final Thoughts and Conclusions	113
APPENDIX: ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL FIELD GUIDE	118
REFERENCES	152
CURRICULUM VITAE	160

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DESE Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

ESSER Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OVERVIEW

The assistant principal role provides a pipeline for future educators, but individuals in this position often lack exposure to the mentorship, training, and coaching they require. As a result, many assistant principals fail to develop the necessary skills for success in their present or upcoming leadership positions, which can lead to attrition (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Novice assistant principals also experience challenges around role ambiguity, limited administrative authority, and difficulties managing their workload (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative ethnography was to gain an understanding of an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment and to discover the coaching, mentoring, support, and training they need. The research questions that guided this qualitative research study were as follows:

1. What are an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment?
2. Based on an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what systems and structures might build their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?
3. Based on an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what coaching, mentoring, support, and training might improve their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?

This research matters to the field of educational leadership because of the challenges assistant principals experience and the supports identified for those in assistant principal positions. Moreover, this research contributes to how those who hold the power

to make educational changes might take action to help frontline leaders rise to the needs and expectations of school staff and students.

Background

At the time of this study, the state of Massachusetts required educational leaders to complete a certification program at the postsecondary level, an administrative internship, and complete and pass the Performance Assessment for Leaders. Educational leadership programs in Massachusetts focus on the assistant principal role in addition to other educational leadership positions. Consequently, these certification programs offer generalized content related to becoming an administrator rather than presenting a scope of study that pertains to one specific administrator role.

The public school sector has many administrative roles within educational administration. Under the school district's superintendent, the central office is typically comprised of assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction, special education, business and finance, and personnel. In addition, all of the departments have district program administrators. At the specific school level, the assistant principal works under the building principal alongside other building administrators, such as the guidance counselor, special education team chairperson, school psychologist, school nurse, and instructional specialists. All of these positions differ vastly from one another; therefore, new leaders have a difficult time comprehending the roles and responsibilities that are expected of them, and this can create confusion for the teachers and staff they supervise (Austin, 1972; Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Kaplan & Owings, 1999).

Assistant principals do not have the support they need to develop into their roles. Limited research existed on understanding what specific coaching, mentoring, training, and support assistant principals need to succeed in the position's many facets. In Massachusetts, assistant principals are currently moving away from an operational management leadership style and assuming the instructional leadership lens. Veteran teachers and teacher-leaders interested in educational leadership currently train and prepare to be assistant principals in ways that prioritize instructional leadership over an operational management approach.

Training at the postsecondary level helps prepare candidates to enter leadership roles, but as it pertains to the role of assistant principal, this training lacks specificity (Austin, 1972; Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Current training is too generic and does not specifically pertain to the assistant principal position; rather, it focuses on the principalship, which differs from the assistant principal job because the former is an executive position and the latter is an operational position (Austin, 1972). In many ways, educational leadership programs have not completely prepared candidates to enter new assistant principal positions. Most programs have focused on preparing new administrators to lead a building versus focusing on the systems and structures that allow a building to function and operate (LaRose, 1987).

Most new administrators fill assistant principal positions when they first enter educational leadership (Oliver, 2005). Completing a certification program does not ensure that a candidate has been adequately trained and has the capacity to succeed in their role (Bartholomew et al., 2005). In addition, the new administrator may not be given

the essential and necessary support they need to succeed in their role as an administrator (Retelle, 2010).

Problem Statement

At the time of this study, the educational sector struggled to train and retain competent leaders (Wells, 2013). According to Retelle (2010), the need for competent and supportive public school administrators has drastically increased as the daily workload for school leaders has amplified. The greater-than-before need and large turnover in administrative positions in public schools have resulted in hiring committees selecting inexperienced school leaders (Wells, 2013). Oftentimes, the inexperienced school leader is a school's former assistant principal. Oliver (2005) asserted the assistant principal position typically serves as the gateway to a leadership position for a teacher and the beginning of the journey to the principalship. Oliver and Retelle added that the early years of a school administrator's career are critical to their success in educational leadership, as assistant principals must learn the systems and structures, skills, values, beliefs, and dispositions of the role and the profession.

Though the role of assistant principal serves as a vital pipeline for future educational leaders, many assistant principals do not receive the mentorship, training, and coaching they need to succeed (Retelle, 2010). Therefore, many assistant principals arrive on the job unprepared to succeed in their current or future leadership roles (Hayes & Burkett, 2021; LaRose, 1987; Oliver, 2005). In order for assistant principals to succeed and be retained as educational leaders, they need individualized training and support for the position, especially in urban PK–8 schools (Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Oliver, 2005;

Retelle, 2010). However, a gap existed in the literature related to the role assistant principals play in urban PK–8 school environments and how they experience training, support, and coaching. In this study, I sought to address the lack of attention in the literature given to the assistant principal position and the need to develop individuals for this role.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative ethnography was to understand an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment and the coaching, mentoring, support, and training they need to succeed. Urban PK–8 schools experience significant leadership turnover, and most educational leadership programs do not specifically target the role of assistant principal, so more insight and understanding of the assistant principal's role are needed to enhance individualized training and support (Austin, 1972). This knowledge might help to train and retain new administrators so they can succeed in urban PK–8 schools (McCarty, 2015; Saphier & King, 1985).

In this study, I sought to provide insight into the assistant principal role and the responsibilities required of those in this role (McCarty, 2015). The information gained may support the mentoring and coaching that assistant principals need to not only succeed in their roles but also to potentially help school districts retain new administrators in the field of educational leadership (McCarty, 2015; Oliver, 2005; Retelle, 2010). In addition, I sought to highlight the assistant principal position while also providing insight for others who may start work in an assistant principal position (McCarty, 2015).

Contextual Background of District and School

I obtained the following contextual information from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The research study's urban PK–8 school site resided in a school district in a northeastern city in Massachusetts. The district had operated for 193 years and served children primarily from middle- to low-income households. The district's overall mission was to offer a comprehensive, positive, structured, and safe school experience emphasizing standards, choice, responsibility, and human dignity (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

The school research site was built in 1891 in a residential neighborhood of a large city, and the school was designated as one of the 28 urban schools in the district and was one of three PK–8 schools in the city. The school served 462 students in Grades PK–8 and about 40 full-time teachers during the 2021–2022 school year. Two assistant principals served the school. The first had been with the school for 8 years. I served as the second assistant principal, and it was my first year in such an assignment. I assisted the principal, who was in his ninth year of overseeing the building (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

The school student body consisted of the following demographics: 39.3% Asian, 34% Hispanic, 15.4% White, and 8.6 % African American. At the time of the study, over 80% of students were categorized as having “high needs” or receiving subsidies. Of those students, 27.7% of the students did not speak English as their first language; 20.3% had disabilities, and 78.8% were economically disadvantaged. In addition, the school served a cohort of students with cognitive or intellectual challenges, and this community of

students also featured an overlapping cohort of students with medical conditions who required specialized nursing support. For the 2021–2022 academic year, the school had been selected as one in need of focused or targeted support (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

A school in need of targeted support is one that is underperforming based on trends related to absolute accomplishment, student growth, and academic improvement. The school received assistance from a number of district-level resources in its turnaround efforts. For the 2021–2022 academic year, the district provided each school with \$204,000 in funds under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) program. In response to COVID-19, this funding resulted from a federal initiative offered to public school districts around the nation to provide emergency financial help. K–12 institutions used the monies to address pandemic learning loss and invest in programs and infrastructure that would allow them to open and run securely. The funding made it possible for the school to hire a second assistant principal, a full-time multilingual parent liaison, an instructional coach, a full-time reading teacher, and a consultant for designing data systems (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). Notably, I was hired for the second assistant principal position.

Problem of Practice and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative ethnography was to understand an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment and the coaching, mentoring, support, and training they need to succeed. I chose ethnographic participant observation as the methodology for this study to highlight the insights and

understanding of the role. The following research questions guided this qualitative research study:

1. What are an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment?
2. Based on an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what systems and structures might build their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?
3. Based on an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what coaching, mentoring, support, and training might improve their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?

The ethnographic participant observation data addressed each of the research questions. As it is intended for any piece of narrative data, both the audience and the researcher personally discovered new meaning, insight, understanding, leadership styles, values, and beliefs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1980). The data included the researcher's journal entries about his educational leadership experiences during his first year as an assistant principal.

Significance of the Study

Very little current literature was available explaining the experiences of an assistant principal in the first-person narrative form. The existing research primarily offered perspectives in the third person (Hartzell, 1995; Pink & Morgan, 2013). In this study, I sought to inform new assistant principals about their roles and to provide guidance that could inform practice (Bartholomew et al., 2005). In this way, this study is

meaningful and relevant to the interactions and experiences that assistant principals face in their many roles.

Assistant principals require more structures, supports, and systems to ensure they succeed as they enter the gateway position for educational leadership (Kaplan & Owings, 1999). The results of this study can inform educational leaders and assistant principals as they reflect on their current practice and their future leadership. In addition, the findings have the potential to inform how others align their leadership styles with their moral compasses to improve their recruitment to the position, retention in the position, and future attainment of higher education leadership positions (Saphier & King, 1985).

Assistant principals are not the only educational leaders who might gain from this study; current sitting principals might be able to reflect on how to induct and mentor new assistant principals given the presented discoveries (LaRose, 1987). These administrators might be able to understand the nuances of the assistant principalship that contribute to the challenges assistant principals experience during their first year as educational leaders (Wells, 2013). Over time, this study could supplement other research centered on helping school administrators more effectively support the next generation of school leaders (Saphier & King, 1985).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The current literature pertaining to the experiences, roles, and responsibilities of the assistant principal as a building leader illustrated the ongoing concerns and challenges of becoming a school and instructional leader. Furthermore, the literature highlighted the continued need to provide more mentoring and professional development for assistant principals. An understanding of assistant principalship as a leadership position is essential for leading a schoolhouse's success, effectiveness, performance, and sustainability, which includes faculty, staff, and student achievements. Day et al. (2016) discussed the implications of having assistant principals support and influence students' achievements. Learning institutions must include a strong assistant principal in order to succeed. One reason for needing a strong assistant principal involves the assistant principal's role in overseeing a school's instructional functions (Dickhauser et al., 2021). Daily, an assistant principal manages the schoolhouse, which directly impacts students' academic performance. Although the assistant principal manages the day-to-day operations of a school, building principals spend the majority of their days networking with various stakeholders, reviewing and setting budgets, and improving school-wide initiatives (Dickhauser et al., 2021). Assistant principals also serve as instructional leaders and continually monitor the development, planning, implementation, and evaluation of building programs created to elevate whole-student performance (Fuller et al., 2019). In this literature review, I provide insights into how assistant principals influence schools' academic outcomes, effectiveness, climate, and culture amid challenging and sometimes daunting experiences.

This literature review consists of three major sections. To begin, I introduce the processes I used to conduct the review. In the first major section of the literature review, I synthesize research pertaining to assistant principals' roles and responsibilities. In the second major section, I review relevant research about the challenges that assistant principals face in both the position and in fulfilling their duties. In the last major section of the literature review, I focus on the pertinent and necessary professional development that assistant principals need to effectively carry out their responsibilities.

Review of Literature Search Process

I first searched for relevant, empirical research using the online library at Boston University and Google Scholar. Then, I sorted through peer-reviewed scholarly articles, journals, and literature related to the dissertation's topic of study by searching the following databases: ProQuest, Sage, JSTOR, EBSCO, Emerald, Google Scholar, Academic Premier, and ResearchGate. While researching and reviewing the literature, I aimed for 80% of the research to have been published within the last 5 years (i.e., 2018–2022) to ensure I included the most relevant and current sources. I searched the aforementioned databases using the following search terms: *assistant principal experiences, roles and responsibilities, assistant principal mentoring and induction, assistant principal leadership styles, school climate and culture, instructional leadership, school performance and academic outcomes, and assistant principal and ethnography.*

Assistant Principals and their Roles and Responsibilities

In this section of the literature review, I focus on assistant principals' experiences related to their roles and responsibilities, with subsections related to monitoring student

academic achievement, providing instructional leadership, evaluating teachers, maintaining student discipline, supporting professional learning, and fostering whole-student development. I determined this information was important and relevant to this study to accurately characterize the multiple facets of the assistant principal position.

Monitoring Student Academic Achievement

Oliver et al. (2019) asserted that assistant principals have roles and responsibilities for monitoring students' academic achievement in school. The authors conducted a quantitative study with 671 students to explore the relationship between academic achievement and classroom engagement among students in the United States. In their findings, Oliver et al. noted that principal leaders, like assistant principals, improved classroom management through student engagement, and they ensured that students' self-efficacy, emotional engagement, and academic efforts enhanced student academic achievement. Similar to Oliver et al., Munir and Aboidullah (2018) used a quantitative approach with 250 school principals and 2,300 teachers to explore how transformational leadership among school leaders impacted students' academic achievement. Munir and Aboidullah highlighted how school leaders influence and impact teachers' academic effectiveness, which improves students' academic achievement because classroom activities and assessments in school are monitored. The literature showed that school leaders, such as assistant principals, clearly have a responsibility in the schoolhouse to monitor students' academic achievement.

Assistant principals play a large role in monitoring student academic achievement. Through a quantitative study, Tingle et al. (2019) investigated how

leadership development programs impact school principals' influence and student academic achievement in schools. Like Munir and Aboidullah (2018), Tingle et al. illustrated how assistant principals who had participated in leadership development programs positively influenced the monitoring of student academic achievement. By building and fostering positive teacher–student relationships, assistant principals can directly and indirectly influence and impact student academic achievement (Tingle et al., 2019). Similarly, in a review of 51 peer-reviewed articles, Liebowitz and Porter (2019) explored the effect of school principals' behaviors on students' academic achievement in the United States. Liebowitz and Porter showed that when assistant principals build and foster teacher–student relationships, promote student teamwork, and monitor classroom activities, they can enhance students' academic achievement.

The reviewed studies revealed that assistant principals play a significant role in monitoring students' academic achievement. Of particular interest to this study, the research has been largely quantitative. This focus on quantitative methods makes sense given the busy lives of assistant principals and the convenience of distributing surveys or using existing numerical data (e.g., academic achievement) to determine how assistant principals monitor academic achievement. Unfortunately, this focus also leaves the more in-depth experiences and understandings of assistant principals unknown.

Assistant Principals Providing Instructional Leadership

A major responsibility of an assistant principal involves providing educators with instructional leadership, and the available research revealed that assistant principals provide instructional leadership through various means, such as managing teacher–

student relationships, scheduling academic plans for teachers and students, and guiding students' assessments to improve academic achievement. Overall, the prior research showed how assistant principals' instructional leadership provided through teacher support and management leads to improved instructional practices.

Researchers have determined that assistant principals contribute to teachers' growth and effectiveness. Sebastian et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between school principals' instructional leadership and academic performance in a quantitative study. Chen and Guo (2020) supported the findings of Sebastian et al. in a quantitative study with 534 teachers in which they investigated the effect of principals' instructional leadership on schoolteachers' teaching strategy. Both Sebastian et al. and Chen and Guo found that assistant principals' instructional leadership influenced teachers' emotional intelligence and teaching practices, which improved school performance.

Additional research supported that assistant principals aim to improve academic performance through instructional leadership. Vogel (2018) investigated the impact of instructional leadership among principals on school academic performance through a quantitative study involving 50 practicing assistant principals. Vogel discovered that through teacher supervision and evaluation and through the use of technology, assistant principals provided instructional leadership for teachers to enhance student learning. Gawlik (2018) confirmed these findings in a quantitative study investigating the relationship between school principals' success in schools and instructional leadership. Gawlik produced comparable findings showing assistant principals do provide instructional leadership. According to Gawlik, assistant principals have a responsibility to

uphold instructional leadership by managing curriculum and instruction, developing a school mission and vision, and promoting school culture and climate for improved academic performance. Overall, assistant principals' leadership impacts teachers' instruction.

From an ethnographic perspective, ethnographic research studies related to this topic were limited to only three studies. These investigations solely focused on students and student discipline from assistant principals' perspectives. The current study differs from previous ones in that it goes beyond examining how students and punishment are perceived. The prior research in this area failed to illuminate the other roles of the assistant principal, such as professional development, instructional leadership, and efforts to foster the whole student.

Assistant Principals Evaluating Teachers

A primary aspect of instructional leadership involves the assistant principal's role of supervising and evaluating teacher practices using evaluation tools. Donaldson and Woulfin (2018) conducted a quantitative study to explore how school principals uphold teacher evaluation systems and structures among teachers. The researchers found that school leaders, including assistant principals, supervise and evaluate teachers by assessing their performance as it pertains to quality education for students. Donaldson and Woulfin explained assistant principals work as instructional leaders conducting quality teacher evaluations focused on teaching practices related to students' academic performance. Similar to Donaldson and Woulfin, Grissom and Bartanen (2019) conducted a quantitative study to investigate principals' effectiveness in performing

teacher evaluations in schools valuing teacher retention. The findings of this study highlighted incidents of effective principals experiencing lower teacher turnover through effective evaluation for improved academic performance. The literature suggested that assistant principals perform teacher evaluations to ensure quality teaching practices.

In secondary schools, assistant principals perform teacher evaluations. Grissom et al. (2019) studied school principal preparation and evaluation programs using a quantitative research design. After analyzing the literature, Grissom et al. reported that student academic performance, teaching practices, and student academic achievement growth serve as the foundations for teacher evaluations performed by assistant principals. Furthering the investigatory findings from Donaldson and Woulfin (2018) and Grissom et al., Harmsen et al. (2018) quantitatively examined 143 principals to explore the correlation between teaching behaviors and attrition and teacher evaluation by the assistant principals. The findings illustrated that evaluating principals' performance potentially influenced teaching behaviors and attrition among teachers. For example, the data showed unwelcomed teacher evaluations may lead to teacher attrition in schools. Consequently, Harmsen et al. advised that school leaders conduct teacher evaluations with the best interest of teachers and students at the center of the entire assessment.

Many of the studies in the current literature illustrated that teacher evaluation is a significant role of an assistant principal. Once again, many of the studies had limitations related to their applicability to specific, unique settings, resulting in methodological flaws. Despite the studies mentioned, a gap has remained in the literature related to training, mentoring, coaching, and support that assistant principals need early in their

educational leadership journeys. In the current study, I sought to provide a qualitative perspective on existing findings, contributing to knowledge about more unique educational settings and assistant principals' day-to-day experiences.

Assistant Principals Maintaining Student Discipline

Another key role of assistant principals involves maintaining student discipline. Sadik (2018) held up this idea in a quantitative study with 445 students to investigate the assistant principals' perception of secondary school students and discipline. The findings highlighted how assistant principals maintain discipline and order among students in the school. Assistant principals in the study ensured that students adhered to school rules and regulations (e.g., dress codes) and administered school punishment to students when dealing with student disciplinary matters. Welsh and Little (2018) furthered Sadik's findings by qualitatively investigating teachers' school disciplinary procedures. Welsh and Little reported that assistant principals implement and reinforce student discipline in schools to hold students accountable for school dress codes, learning schedules, and school rules to enhance academic performance.

Additionally, culturally responsive practices associated with student discipline represent an added layer of responsibilities. Bal et al. (2018) quantitatively explored the implementation of school disciplinary measures and culturally responsive school discipline in the United States. Bal et al. agreed with the findings of Welsh and Little (2018) and Sadik (2018) and also found that school principals address racial disparities in school discipline and hold students accountable for adhering to school policies. In addition, Bal et al. discussed how equal disciplinary measures are applied to all students

regardless of their racial affiliations. Although the discussed studies indicated that assistant principals maintain school discipline, other studies have contradictory findings.

Assistant Principals Supporting Professional Learning

Assistant principals have a responsibility to provide support to staff around professional learning in schools. In a quantitative study, De Nobile (2018) investigated approaches to professional learning for middle leadership in schools. De Nobile found that school principals enhance teachers' professional learning through coaching and mentoring to build capacity and distribute leadership in schools. Jensen (2022) produced comparable results in a quantitative study where the investigator examined school leaders' school leadership and professional learning. Jensen extended De Nobile's results by illustrating that school principals support professional learning among teachers by implementing and embedding training and programs into schools to improve teachers' pedagogy.

Professional learning provides teachers with skills and tools to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds and students who have different learning abilities experience academic achievement and performance (Jensen, 2022; Mercer, 2016). Philipsen et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review of peer-reviewed articles to explore the enhancement of teacher professional learning in schools. The investigators found that assistant principals encourage staff professional learning through coaching and training focused on how to teach in diverse settings. Brennan et al. (2021) justified the findings of Philipsen et al. in a qualitative study where the investigators explored the support for inclusive teaching in schools through professional learning. Brennan et al. found that in

order for teachers to meet the needs of students with special needs, teachers require support from continued professional learning geared toward inclusive teaching practices. Effective professional learning for staff is characterized by training and programs designed to enhance teachers' ability to teach students from diverse backgrounds, teach students with various learning abilities, and improve academic achievement (Minott, 2020).

Overall, research has shown that assistant principals support professional learning in schools, particularly in the areas of coaching and mentoring, distributive leadership, student academic achievement, and supporting teacher skill gaps. However, a lack of qualitative and ethnographic research in this area has resulted in a limited understanding of assistant principals' challenges and successes in supporting professional learning.

Assistant Principals Fostering the Whole-Student Development

In an additional aspect of their role, assistant principals provide counseling to students regarding their academic progress and achievement. Collier et al. (2019) examined the support policies for improving students' academic achievement and safety through a qualitative research study. The investigators found that school leaders (e.g., principals, assistant principals, and deans of students) provide students with guiding and counseling services associated with safety, academic achievement, and overall well-being. Assistant principals primarily ensure that students adhere to school regulations and policies while also addressing the causes of negative behavior (Collier et al., 2019). The findings in Collier et al. mirrored a quantitative study conducted by Janson et al. (2019), who investigated 410 high school principals in Indiana to explore the return to school

accommodations and perceptions of high school principals regarding students with concussions. The findings illustrated that school leaders, including assistant principals, provide counseling to students suffering from concussions in regard to their academic achievement.

In a similar vein, Ruiz et al. (2018) investigated the role of school principals as student counselors. This quantitative study with 290 K–12 public school principals showed that school principals, including assistant principals, play a large role in ensuring that students receive counseling services through appropriate guidance and programmatic supports. Ruiz et al. asserted that assistant principals help students prepare for college and career, support their well-being, and ensure they uphold school rules. In agreement with Ruiz et al., Lowery et al. (2018) quantitatively studied the preparation of principals to support comprehensive school counseling. The investigators found that assistant principals play a role in facilitating student counseling as it pertains to student learning habits, social–emotional well-being, and college and career readiness. In addition, if necessary, assistant principals consult with outside providers and clinicians if mental health issues surface to foster the whole student and maintain academic achievement (Lowery et al., 2018). Current research confirmed that assistant principals foster whole-student development by providing counseling services or supporting school counselors, outside providers, and clinicians in their counseling services.

Conclusion

The research showed that the assistant principal position involves many pertinent and necessary roles and responsibilities. Monitoring student academic achievement,

providing instructional leadership, evaluating teachers, maintaining student discipline, supporting professional learning, and fostering whole-student development represent the various roles and responsibilities with which assistant principals engage on a daily basis. The assistant principal clearly serves as the support person for students, faculty, and staff. This prior research concerning assistant principals' experiences, however, lacks a focus on how assistant principals develop and foster relationships between all stakeholders. Many aspiring assistant principals do not have the requisite skills to develop relationships while in a school leadership position. In addition, the research failed to show what the unique day-to-day experiences entail when an assistant principal engages in their numerous roles. Therefore, I determined an ethnography could offer the potential to delve deeper into these areas to understand them better.

Assistant Principal Challenges

This next major section of the literature review centers around the challenges that assistant principals experience. The main subsections include the challenges related to role ambiguity, administrative authority, and workload. I determined this information was relevant to this study because it highlighted the challenges that assistant principals face while they juggle their various roles and responsibilities.

Challenges Related to Role Ambiguity

Assistant principals have faced significant challenges associated with role ambiguity. Blake (2020) quantitatively investigated the role of conflict in the duties of high school principals and counselors. The study showed that assistant principals took on tasks that were not clearly defined and contended with unclear role objectives for

teachers. Blake explained this created role ambiguity for the assistant principals that led to confusion for assistant principals. Depending on the task, this ambiguity negatively impacted assistant principals' job satisfaction. Similarly, Ganon-Shilon and Schechter (2019) quantitatively investigated role ambiguity in leadership roles among school principals in rural special schools. Ganon-Shilon and Schechter echoed Blake's findings. The authors showed that role ambiguity resulted in intra-role conflict because of contradictory demands among positions and because of vague expectations regarding the results of performed tasks. Ganon-Shilon and Schechter highlighted that assistant principal role ambiguity may produce negative performance outcomes.

In addition to role ambiguity, conflicting job demands represent another significant challenge for assistant principals. Ganon-Shilon and Schechter's (2019) findings resembled those of a mixed-method study conducted by Garwood et al. (2018) regarding role ambiguity among special teachers. This investigation showed that role ambiguity and role conflict represented common challenges faced by assistant principals in schools. The authors found that confusion in assistant principals' tasks could result in contradictory expectations, leading to role conflict about their positions. Wang et al. (2018) replicated the results of Garwood et al. in a quantitative investigation of assistant principals' job satisfaction. The investigators found that one of the significant components influencing urban PK–8 performance involved role ambiguity. Wang et al. illustrated that role ambiguity resulted in conflicting tasks that hindered assistant principals from providing necessary instructional support for teachers. Although the literature review produced limited current research on the role ambiguity of assistant

principals, the literature did highlight the challenges of conflicting job demands and unclear definitions of roles and responsibilities.

Challenges Related to Limited Administrative Authority

Assistant principals often experience challenges associated with leadership influences within their schools. Skinner et al. (2021) qualitatively investigated teacher professional identity among assistant principals as leaders in the school. After conducting a study with 36 teachers, the investigators found that assistant principals' roles gave them a small amount of space to be innovative and influential in their duties. Similarly, Hansen (2018) investigated why rural school principals end up leaving their positions. Like Skinner et al., Hansen found assistant principals had a limited amount of administrative authority, which decreased their job satisfaction and increased their intentions to leave. Hansen showed that assistant principals desire a larger role as instructional leaders and clearly defined roles and responsibilities between the principal and the assistant principal position.

Limited administrative authority represents another challenge experienced by assistant principals. Like Hansen (2018), Liu (2020) qualitatively studied the challenges of being an assistant principal. In agreement with Hansen, Liu found the school principal determined most of the tasks and responsibilities of the assistant principal. Consequently, Liu asserted, assistant principals have restricted autonomy, limited freedom, and inadequate independence and discretion to perform their duties according to their job descriptions. In an additional quantitative study, Sutchter et al. (2019) investigated the factors influencing the teacher shortage and assistant principals' job satisfaction in

schools. Analysis of the data showed that assistant principals have limited administrative authority. In addition, Sutchter et al. claimed that the assistant principal experienced decreased job satisfaction with an enhanced intention of departing their position when the principal allocates their tasks.

Challenges Related to Workload

The workload for assistant principals can become challenging and overwhelming. Lim and Pollock (2019) qualitatively investigated the effect of workload on assistant principals' leadership roles. The investigators found that assistant principals had their own duties and responsibilities, and carried the responsibilities allocated to them by the school principal. Lim and Pollock elaborated, explaining that these added responsibilities prevented assistant principals from professionally learning other aspects of the role. In a similar qualitative study, Kim (2019) explored the relationship between workload and job performance of assistant principals and affirmed Lim and Pollock's results. Kim found that more principals allocated more responsibilities to assistant principals, and this negatively impacted them as they were unable to keep up with all the other administrative work. These additional responsibilities lowered job satisfaction among assistant principals as the tasks became a burden not associated with their true role as instructional leaders.

The workload allocated to assistant principals will either influence or hurt assistant principals' work motivation and job satisfaction. In a qualitative study, Broughton (2022) investigated the experience of current female assistant principals. The study showed that additional workloads for assistant principals caused tension between

the position's instructional and operational demands, which potentially resulted in lower motivation and job satisfaction for assistant principals. The study lacked a diverse set of participants and involved only one geographic location. As a result, Broughton's insight for additional research revolves around diverse populations and various sample settings.

Conclusion

The research in this section supported that there are many challenges associated with the assistant principal position. Challenges related to role ambiguity, administrative authority, and workload showcase that assistant principals face challenges because numerous roles and responsibilities make the position itself a challenge. However, the research failed to provide insight into how assistant principals cope with these challenges and maintain their efficacy. In this current study, I aimed to identify the challenges and describe these coping mechanisms.

Professional Development for Assistant Principals

In this last section of the literature review, I focus on the professional development and learning that assistant principals need to be effective. The main subsections include instructional leadership development for assistant principals, professional learning for assistant principals, and mentoring and coaching for assistant principals. I determined this information to be relevant to the study because it outlines the supports that assistant principals need to be effective in the roles and responsibilities associated with the assistant principalship.

Instructional Leadership Development for Assistant Principals

Instructional leadership represents one of the areas that can be used to prepare assistant principals to lead with the aim of improving students' success. Assistant principals uphold policies and realize external accountability (Gurley et al., 2015). They also influence learning in schools, which impacts school effectiveness (Baker et al., 2018). Previous literature reviews have highlighted the importance of instructional leadership practices on academic outcomes. Liang and Augustine-Shaw (2016) conducted a literature review that revealed that leadership with an instructional focus directly impacts students' learning outcomes, and Liang and Augustine-Shaw found the need for assistant principals to continue to learn how to provide instructional leadership. Berkovich (2018) produced similar findings, showing that instructional leadership influenced students' achievement. Tonich (2021) synthesized that developing assistant principals into instructional leaders will impact students' achievement through their instructional work with teachers. Tonich also revealed that instructional leaders who empower teachers and promote participation positively impact lesson objectives and assessments. These findings suggest that developing assistant principals as instructional leaders can increase their role within instructional practices, which will influence student achievement.

Despite the link between instructional leadership and students' achievement, a gap existed in the literature regarding how assistant principals effectively influence student learning outcomes (Baker et al., 2018; Morgan, 2018; Van den Ouweland et al., 2019). Most of the research pertained to the principal role, with mention of how the

assistant principal's roles and responsibilities cannot be defined and measured. Through instructional leadership, assistant principals can play an active role in the schools by impacting teachers through coaching, mentoring, and evaluation, which will positively influence student outcomes (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018). Given the limitations in the current literature, I determined a need to investigate how assistant principals develop as instructional leaders who influence and impact learning outcomes, school effectiveness, climate, and culture (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018; Gurley et al., 2015; Hallinger et al., 2020; Tonich, 2021).

Professional Learning for Assistant Principals

The current literature contained few studies about assistant principals receiving professional learning to advance as school leaders (Pharis et al., 2019). Assistant principals need to have experiences where they professionally learn to influence and impact student achievement, climate, and culture. Gumus (2019) investigated assistant principals' perceptions of barriers affecting their ability to influence and impact students' achievement and found a lack of professional learning opportunities that could empower assistant principals to influence organizational policies. Like Gumus, Honig et al. (2019) produced similar findings, showing that assistant principals lacked professional learning experiences that support school performance. Participants in this investigation expressed a desire for more professional learning experiences and programs geared toward the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals.

Additional research supported the idea that assistant principals experience career growth and influence and impact students' achievement, school effectiveness, climate,

and culture when offered professional learning (Cunningham et al., 2019). Cosner et al. (2015) found that when assistant principals lacked opportunities for professional learning experiences, their leadership skills remained undeveloped. Cunningham et al. (2019) asserted that limited professional learning enhances role ambiguity because assistant principals feel unsure about their specific roles and responsibilities. Additional professional learning experiences for assistant principals around roles and responsibilities will allow them to become instructional leaders who aim to impact students' achievement (Cunningham et al., 2019). Burkhauser (2017) discussed that when schools offer assistant principals professional learning opportunities, they enhance their leadership capacity by acquiring necessary skills, such as best practices for mentoring and coaching. This quality training can improve schools (Cohen & Schechter, 2019; Cosner et al., 2015). Cansoy et al. (2021) agreed that professional learning for assistant principals provides them with the knowledge and tools needed to enhance their capacity for leading in their buildings. Like teachers and other leaders, assistant principals should have opportunities to professionally learn to develop into instructional leaders who influence and impact students' achievement.

Mentoring and Coaching for Assistant Principals

Through strategic mentoring and coaching, assistant principals can develop into instructional leaders who aim to positively influence student learning, school effectiveness, climate, and culture (Lochmiller & Karnopp, 2016). In order for assistant principals to understand how their roles and responsibilities can enable them to influence a school community, assistant principals must have a qualified veteran mentor who can

also serve as a coach (Cunningham et al., 2019). Barnett et al. (2017) conducted a study exploring assistant principals' mentorship and coaching experiences to discover if the assistant principals were prepared for the principalship. The findings suggested that assistant principals who had mentoring and coaching experiences understood what was expected of them in their roles. They could also influence higher performance by fostering relationships in their school community. Barnett explained that mentoring and coaching allowed assistant principals to experience in-the-moment situations. Furthermore, mentoring sessions helped to prepare assistant principals to support students and teachers to influence higher academic performance (Barnett et al., 2017; Lochmiller & Karnopp, 2016). Assistant principals who act as instructional leaders directly influence and impact their school's mission and vision, goals, assessment, and relationship with internal and external stakeholders (Cunningham et al., 2019). Mentoring and coaching experiences related to instructional leadership structures provide assistant principals with a wider scope of their roles and responsibilities, which helps them become leaders of instruction (Hayes & Burkett, 2021).

Coaching assistant principals in communication and in stakeholder relationships can enhance the school environment and improve student achievement (Cunningham et al., 2019). In a qualitative study, Borkar (2016) found that assistant principals who were coached in communication and fostering relationships influenced academic outcomes. Assistant principals can involve stakeholders in learning targets, which enhances learning outcomes, and assistant principals can build stakeholder rapport before determining the learning targets (Borkar, 2016). Cosner et al. (2015) revealed that assistant principals

need feedback on various situations, experiences, and approaches. Communication coaching can empower assistant principals to communicate effectively when evaluating teachers and setting goals to improve learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The literature clearly showed that professional development and learning can ensure that assistant principals are both effective and retained. Instructional leadership development, professional learning, and mentoring and coaching for assistant principals provide structures and frameworks that can facilitate assistant principals' successful implementation of their roles and responsibilities. The research failed to show how this works in daily operations, so with this ethnography, I aimed to show how these opportunities should surface on the front line while I served as an assistant principal.

Chapter Summary

The analysis of the literature revealed the limitations in the current research regarding leadership styles and student achievement as they relate to the assistant principal's role. The literature review revealed the several roles assistant principals play in schools facilitating students' learning achievement (Baker et al., 2018). Roles at times may be ambiguous, but overall, assistant principals maintain student discipline; perform teacher evaluations; create professional relationships with teachers, students, and parents; and perform other administrative roles allocated by the school principal (Munir & Aboidullah, 2018; Tingle et al., 2019). This review of the literature revealed the direct link between students' achievement and school leadership. Moreover, the review of the literature has constructed the idea that assistant principals' leadership behaviors in

supportive instructional practices create a safe and welcoming environment for all students, enhance students' motivation, and provide counseling services for students to positively impact students' academic achievement (Huang et al., 2020; Steyn, 2018).

Assistant principals' leadership styles that often directly impact students' success include democratic, transactional, and transformational styles (Dickhauser et al., 2021). Previous literature provides preliminary evidence related to the associations between leadership styles and student outcomes (Morgan, 2018; Van den Ouweland et al., 2019). The literature on this topic was limited, and the current literature does not address how assistant principals can improve urban PK–8 schools along with overall school climate and culture (Baker et al., 2018). Most of all, the literature pertained only to the school principal's role (Baker et al., 2018). This primary focus on school principals presented a gap in the literature that this qualitative study sought to address. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), the relatively new research methodology of ethnography enables researchers to explore their own stories to uncover, interpret, and critique social structures and power dynamics. Ethnographers also focus on the meaning they are making in socially constructed situations, enabling them to reconstruct and deconstruct those experiences to arrive at new understandings and realizations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology I used to conduct this study. In this chapter, I discuss the justifications for various research decisions and describe the setting, sample, population, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, and

data analysis steps. The chapter concludes with a statement of positionality and the trustworthiness processes I employed.

CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Urban PK–8 schools have a significant turnover in leadership, and most educational leadership programs do not specifically narrow their training directly toward the role of assistant principal (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). More insight and understanding of the assistant principal’s role are needed to enhance individualized training and support (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative ethnography was to understand an assistant principal’s leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment and the coaching, mentoring, support, and training they need to succeed. The following research questions guided this qualitative research study:

1. What are an assistant principal’s leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment?
2. Based on an assistant principal’s leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what systems and structures might build their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?
3. Based on an assistant principal’s leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what coaching, mentoring, support, and training might improve their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?

In this study, I sought to provide insight into assistant principals’ experiences and to illuminate the supports they need to carry out their responsibilities. Educational leadership programs typically target principals, and knowledge about the skills and dispositions of assistant principals is often lacking. The information gained from this study may strengthen the mentoring and coaching needs of assistant principals to support

new administrators and foster their retention. Additionally, I sought to provide guidance for those who may start an assistant principalship position.

Study Methodology

I used a qualitative methodology in this investigation. When investigating phenomena that are difficult to quantify, such as feelings, experiences, and views, qualitative research represents the most appropriate method (Levitt et al., 2018). By focusing on the participants' perspectives, qualitative researchers closely observe real-world phenomena. Qualitative researchers also aim to gain a comprehensive grasp of a subject by exploring the significance of experiences to determine why and how they occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Qualitative researchers frequently seek in-depth participant insights, which explain the “what,” “how,” and “why” of social phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980).

In the present study, I analyzed data including the experiences, setting, social interactions, and phenomena of a novice assistant principal; hence, I determined a qualitative methodology would be most suitable. Because assistant principals deal with complicated, nuanced situations and concerns related to educating youth and leading staff, I believed these discoveries could not be quantified numerically. By employing a qualitative methodology, I sought to highlight an assistant principal's lived experiences and to understand how those experiences contribute to the meaning ascribed to serving as an assistant principal.

Additionally, I used Massachusetts DESE's School-Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.) to anchor my understanding of the roles and

responsibilities of an assistant principal. The School-Level Administrator Rubric covers broad knowledge, skills, and effective practice. Management, operations, instructional leadership, family and community involvement, and professional culture all represent administrator standards. This rubric describes school administration leadership, so the principal or district administrator can use it to evaluate assistant principals. This rubric may change administrators' roles. The Massachusetts DESE advises administrators and evaluators to strategically implement the rubric by reviewing and prioritizing indications and elements depending on their role, tasks, professional practice, student learning, and school development goals. Performance descriptors describe teaching and organizational performance as unsatisfactory, requires improvement, proficient, or outstanding based on observable and quantifiable educator actions and behaviors.

Study Design

For the study design, I employed a qualitative ethnography. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Spradley (1979, 1980) contended that the primary purpose of ethnographic research is to gain a deep understanding of social environments and networks by interacting with participants in real-world settings. The authors continued that ethnographic researchers also utilize a combination of observational data and discussions with participants about their experiences, creating a rich data collection process that emphasizes the meaning of the lived experiences. I determined an ethnographic research approach to be the most appropriate design for this study because, as Creswell and Poth and Spradley explained, ethnographic researchers seek to emphasize the cultural and social aspects associated with a phenomenon. The particular cultural and social aspects of

this study included what it was like to be a first-year assistant principal. From this focus, the possibility existed to identify insights into how first-year assistant principals can change and grow and what supports they might need in their development. As an assistant principal, I served as the researcher and the participant by recording observational data gathered during my employment as a first-year assistant principal during the 2021–2022 academic year.

No design is perfect, but I deemed this ethnographic research as appropriate because every assistant principal’s experience is different. I also believed that other assistant principals would be able to relate to the events and stories told throughout this research project. No single graduate-level course can fully prepare an assistant principal for what they experience in practice, but my hope was that this research and its findings would lead to improved educational preparation for those entering the field as first-year assistant principals.

Setting, Sample, and Population

The following contextual information includes data obtained from the Massachusetts DESE. This ethnographic research study took place in an urban city northeast of Boston, Massachusetts. At the time of the study, 112,000 residents lived in this industrial city. The PK–8 school in which the researcher-participant worked served approximately 462 students. The school was one of 28 schools in the district and one of three PK–8 schools in the city. The students came from diverse backgrounds and cultures, with the largest population classified as Asian (40.9%). Approximately 31% of students were Hispanic, and 16.9% were White. The African American student

population had recently increased to 8.2% (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

A very high number of students in the school came from populations traditionally considered underserved. Nearly 78% of the students were considered high needs and received subsidies. Among those students, 31% were nonnative English speakers. More than half of the students (56.5%) were economically disadvantaged, and 22.4% were students with disabilities. In addition to the diverse backgrounds, the school educated students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities who received life skills programming as well as students who were medically fragile and required specialized nursing support (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

Data Collection

Data collection for this study consisted of any and all records that contributed to the retelling of the story of a first-year assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These data included researcher-participant journals and material data that provided context for the journal entries (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters). In the following paragraphs, I explain the data collection methods.

Reflective journaling represented the primary form of data collection, and these entries focused on my observational experiences. As the participant and researcher, I kept detailed notes on my daily observations and experiences related to my role as an assistant principal. In ethnographic research, observational data provides the primary data collection method (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980). In ethnographic research, researchers blur the line between subject and participant by closely observing

participants in real-world environments and taking notes on their experiences. In the present study, I acted as both the observer and the participant, so my notes related to my assistant principal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980).

The stories included in this study represent those I deemed significant for the research questions, but my growth during this research also served my desire to change my leadership practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Professional reflection plays a large role in professional growth, so no other method of research would facilitate the desired change and growth other than acting as a participant-observer in an ethnographic research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980).

The journal entries provided raw and authentic personal documentation of events and feelings. The journal entries captured my professional day-to-day experiences from my first day on the job until the last day of my first year as assistant principal, which was 11 months later. The journal entries detailed my actions, dialogues, and emotions as I carried out my responsibilities. I composed the entries each night, recounting the day's highs, lows, and thoughts in which feelings and emotions to preserve. In addition, I recorded the significant impacts on my role as well as the systems and structures of the school and operations. The data were narrative in nature as I shared my experiences.

Along with the nightly personal journal entries, I collected existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters to provide additional data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979). The journal entries provided the majority of the data needed, but I collected the other records to increase the study's validity; all of the data produced the emotional story of a first-year assistant principal in an urban PK-8 school.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, I categorized the nightly journal entries and other documents per the procedures Spradley (1980) attributed to ethnography. I separated the data into areas of daily roles, responsibilities, and routines. I let the categories emerge from the data to ensure that the real-life experiences determined the themes with no imposed predetermination or expectation of results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once separated and categorized, I used the data to highlight the physical details, events, thoughts, descriptions, and dialogue to help in the process of raw, emotional recall (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979). This process allowed me to engage in an intense reflection on specific events and memories. This emotional reflection represented a crucial aspect of data analysis (Spradley, 1979). I omitted all names in the retold narrative.

The analysis of the data consisted of an inductive thematic analysis, as described by Percy et al. (2015). The technique of inductive thematic analysis is one in which the researcher examines the gathered data in great depth to recognize recurring themes within the data that illustrate significant meaning in relation to the event. In 2015, Percy et al. devised the inductive thematic analysis process that I applied to this investigation. Percy et al.'s approach to analysis includes the following phases: (a) getting acquainted, (b) coding, (c) grouping codes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) naming and defining themes, and (f) writing the report.

In accordance with Percy et al. (2015), after becoming familiar with the entirety of the dataset and highlighting all significant components, I examined the data that was

previously highlighted to evaluate whether they were pertinent to the research topic. That is, I discarded the highlighted data that were unrelated to the study questions. I saved the data that were not pertinent in a separate file in the event that I needed to reexamine or analyze it to determine applicability. Also, in accordance with Percy et al., I assigned meaningful descriptors to segments of data that aligned with the research questions. In certain situations, I noted the descriptor was a particularly meaningful word that was contained in the data segment. In other situations, I noted the descriptor was a term that summarized the meaning of the data segments. I then grouped together all of the classified data that addressed a specific meaning. This process served as the foundation for the groupings going forward. As per Percy et al., I grouped all related data together, taking into account the acceptable degree of connection between them. I performed data analysis of the groups of data (i.e., themes and subthemes) to answer the research questions and offer suggestions on how to support assistant principals.

Statement of Positionality

In ethnographic research, the line between researcher and subject is more permeable than in other approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980). In this study, I used my relevant experiences as an assistant principal during this study as well as prior experiences as a teacher, team leader, and instructional coach, to inform the study findings and formulate the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980). This study allowed me to interchange between an outsider (i.e., one who views the position from afar), to an insider (i.e., one who is an assistant principal; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1980). My ability to fully immerse myself in the

research moved this study away from a summary of the position to a synthesis defining inquiry and further research in order for other educational leaders to understand what it is like to become an assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1980).

In this study, my personal and professional experiences crossed paths with my current reality; thus, the reality of the position differed vastly from the beliefs and thoughts I had about the assistant principalship (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Through all of the interactions with the various stakeholders, I sought to define and highlight successful moments from dysfunctional chaos (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Shah, 2017; Spradley, 1979, 1980). My biases, derived from my personal experiences and insights, played into how I defined school, learning, and leadership (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980). My experiences and insights define my identity and my leadership role, so they are essential to the meanings, understandings, and insights the reader gains from this research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980). As an assistant principal, researcher, and individual, I aimed to describe my own experiences, insights, and understandings accurately and clearly to contribute to the available research regarding the supports assistant principals need early in their educational leadership careers (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980).

Trustworthiness

This section covers the method for judging credibility and the investigation's ethical consequences. Researchers employ a variety of procedures to make sure their data are reliable. Shenton (2004) explained qualitative researchers must ensure they correctly

interpret the data and check their biases. In order to establish the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, I used Shenton's four trustworthiness criteria.

Credibility refers to whether a study measures what the researcher intended to measure, which directly links to the research questions (i.e., internal validity; Shenton, 2004). According to Shenton (2004), to establish credibility, the researcher must: (a) use proven research methods in a qualitative investigation in general and information science in particular; (b) learn the organizational culture before collecting data; and (c) use a variety of methods, particularly individual interviews, focus groups, and observation (i.e., triangulation), which represent the main methods for qualitative research. In this qualitative research study, I aligned reflective prompts and vignettes to the research questions to demonstrate my experiences as a first-year assistant principal. I used triangulation by using reflective researcher journals and other material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) to provide a rich account of the culture, climate, organization, and demographics that situated my experiences. In addition, this did not represent just one moment in time; rather, it spanned over 11 months, which amounted to one complete academic year.

Shenton (2004) explained *transferability* is the second priority of trustworthiness, which includes the strategies researchers use to ensure that study results may be applied to other similar contexts. According to Shenton, the researcher must include enough fieldwork site background to allow the reader to draw this link. This background may reflect the distinct contextual realities that inform the findings. In this ethnographic

research, I presented rich details and descriptive findings related to my first year as an assistant principal so that other educational administrators can determine if my experiences hold relevance and value to their situations (i.e., reader generalization; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Dependability represents the third criterion of trustworthiness. Shenton (2004) defined dependability as relating to whether the qualitative researcher described their methodology and decisions in enough detail to enable a future researcher to replicate the work, if not always, with the same success. Shenton explained that a detailed review lets the reader assess what protocols were followed and how they were carried out. As is typical of qualitative dissertations, Chapters Three and Four of this study demonstrate dependability as I devoted these chapters to the methodological approaches and rationales for my decisions, and I detailed the participant, data gathering, and analysis steps I took.

Confirmability, as described by Shenton (2004), represents the last component of trustworthiness. To establish confirmability, researchers must provide explanations of methods and processes to indicate that the findings arose from the participants' experiences and thoughts rather than the researcher's traits and preferences. Shenton explained triangulation promotes confirmability by reducing investigator bias and that confirmability depends on how much the researcher admits their biases. I addressed confirmability through my reflective journals and the positionality statement. I also provided details regarding the data collected and what data led to the themes reported in the findings.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three includes the decisions and justifications I made when conducting this qualitative ethnography. I sought to provide insight into the experiences and support of assistant principals to foster support and retention of new administrators and provide guidance for those who may start an assistant principalship position. Data collection consisted of daily reflective journals in which I reflected on my daily and weekly leadership experiences. Data also included meeting agendas and notes. I used an inductive thematic analysis to arrive at themes and subthemes related to the research questions. The chapter concluded with a description of the trustworthiness strategies I used to demonstrate the credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability of the findings. In Chapter Four, I present the three major themes that emerged from this study: (a) clash of values and expectations; (b) health, safety, and well-being; and (c) personal growth.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH AND DATA

High turnover in public schools has resulted in hiring committees selecting inexperienced school leaders (Wells, 2013). Furthermore, Wells (2013) explained that training and retaining competent educational leaders in public education presents a struggle. The workload has become greater than before, and the need for competent and supportive administrators has drastically increased (Retelle, 2010). Typically, the assistant principal position serves as the gateway to the principalship, but the assistant principal is oftentimes an inexperienced school leader (Oliver, 2005). In the early years of working as an assistant principal, the individual learns the systems and structures, skills, values, beliefs, and dispositions of the role and the profession, so these early years are critical to success in educational leadership (Oliver, 2005; Retelle, 2010).

This qualitative ethnographic study provides an understanding of the societal role of assistant principals in urban PK–8 school environments and how assistant principals experience training, support, and coaching. In this study, I examined the lived experiences of a first-year assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school. The mentoring and coaching that assistant principals need are embedded in the findings of this study. Through the findings, I highlight the support and the dispositions assistant principals need to carry out their responsibilities and to bolster new administrators' retention. In addition, the findings of this study address the assistant principal position and roles.

The researcher served as the assistant principal during the study, which was an added administrative position on the leadership team at the school. The position became available with an influx of ESSER funding. The current leadership team had been leading

for nearly 7 academic years, and during that time, the school was classified as urban PK–8. In the spring of 2021, the school’s site council recommended that an additional assistant principal position be budgeted for the 2021–2022 academic year.

I used an ethnographic study design to gain a deep understanding of the school’s social environments and networks through an interaction with the participant in a real-world setting. The research relied on a combination of observational data and discussions with participants about their experiences; this created a rich data collection process that emphasized the meaning of the participants’ lived experiences coupled with my own personal narrative. The use of ethnographic participant observation highlighted the insights and understanding of the role (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1980).

The formation of patterns begins with the act of grouping similar elements together. The pattern strengthens as the researcher examines the data and organizes the codes into groups. Codes that are connected to existing groups are added to the first group. In the meantime, data unconnected to the topic at hand form new patterns or are stored away for later evaluation. As the researcher moves forward with the techniques for processing the data, they store away any information that does not correspond to the patterns that have developed for subsequent consideration. Information that does not conform to any eventual pattern and does not contribute significantly to answering the research questions may, in the end, be filed away in the folder designated for material that is irrelevant to the investigation (Percy et al., 2015).

The researcher reviews each of the different groups to identify common themes. It is possible to build a single group by combining patterns, also known as groups of codes,

with subjects that are conceptually related to one another (Percy et al., 2015). In the meantime, the researcher may divide groups with an excessive variety of codes into different topics. After forming the preliminary themes, I looked back over the data that was stored separately and reintroduced codes as necessary. I then named and defined the themes. After naming and defining the topics, I produced a study report to describe the results of their investigation.

This ethnographic research unfolded differently each day and was guided by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Spradley (1979, 1980). However, I realized through journaling the amount of data that I had at my fingertips each evening. Not only does the journal process become a way to reflect and think about the memories and moments, but it also serves as a way to better inform future practice. The data was real and raw and focused on the experience of being an assistant principal in the schoolhouse. I wanted my narrative to help others to understand the complexities of the position, but also to reveal the essential systems, structures, and supports that will ensure the assistant principal's success and retention in the field as an educational leader. My recall helped articulate how events, stories, and moments unfolded, to provide further context to each, and to connect them to other journal entries.

As a participant observer, I could not recall every story, situation, and emotion. This study simply offers a glimpse into what an assistant principal's job is like in terms of roles and responsibilities. Being able to share my story in the first personal narrative allows me to have a voice to express my knowledge of the research gained throughout the ethnography (Spradley, 1979). I also aimed to inform those entering an assistant principal

position. The following research questions guided this qualitative research study:

1. What are an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment?
2. Based on an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what systems and structures might build their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?
3. Based on an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what coaching, mentoring, support, and training might improve their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?

I addressed and captured each of the research questions in the ethnographic participant observation study to better understand the assistant principalship. As is intended for any piece of narrative literature, both the audience and the researcher personally should discover new meaning, insight, understanding, leadership styles, values, and beliefs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1980).

Overview of District and School

At the time of the study (i.e., 2021–2022), the central district office leadership identified capacity issues supporting schools and made staffing changes. The district lacked the ability to distribute resources to all students and classrooms at the same time as the district made large investments in educational technology. The district experienced a spike in new enrollment amid a lack of candidates for a variety of district- and school-level jobs. Consequently, the district struggled with a shortage of substitute teachers, making it difficult for teachers to leave the building to attend professional development.

A range of district-level resources helped the school in its turnaround efforts. According to the Massachusetts DESE's website, each school in this district received \$204,000 in ESSER funding for the 2021–2022 academic year. The funding was provided by a federal program distributing emergency financial assistance to public school districts across the country in response to COVID-19. With the funds, K–12 institutions addressed pandemic learning loss and invested in infrastructure and programs to open and operate safely (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

In the research site school, this funding allowed the school to recruit and hire a second assistant principal, a full-time bilingual parent liaison, an instructional coach, a full-time reading teacher, and a consultant to create data systems. During the 2021–2022 academic year, the research site educated 462 students in Grades PK–8 and employed roughly 40 full-time teachers. The school was one of three PK–8 schools in the city and one of the 28 schools in the district. The principal, who was in his ninth year of leading the building, led two assistant principals, one who had been with the school for 8 years and the other being me, a first-year assistant principal (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

The staff put expended much effort into providing the students with engaging, challenging, and rewarding learning opportunities. This was critical as some of our students' families struggled to meet even their most basic needs in terms of shelter, food, water, and health care. The racial makeup of students was as follows: Asian (39.3%), White (15.4%), Hispanic (34%), and African American (8.6%; Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

The Massachusetts DESE classified 80.5% of the students as having high needs or receiving subsidies. Among them, 27.7% of the students spoke English as their second language; 78.8% were economically disadvantaged, and 20.3% of students had disabilities (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). This community of students with disabilities also included an overlapping cohort of students with medical issues that required specialist nursing support, as well as a cohort of students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities.

The district identified the school as needing concentrated or targeted support for the 2021–2022 academic year. According to the Massachusetts DESE, a school in need of targeted support is an underperforming school based on trends in absolute achievement, student growth, and academic improvement. The school did offer some opportunities for professional growth, and teachers collaborated closely with instructional coaches. The school placed a high priority on family interaction, and staff members regularly updated parents on information as well as planned family engagement activities throughout the academic year.

The building principal employed a weekly newsletter, a weekly events calendar, access to student services, and links to the school's informational website. During the academic year under study, I served as the new assistant principal. I supported the family engagement by providing grade-specific details for students and families that were available on the website. I also monitored and supported teachers' participation in school-based committees.

Overview of Methodology

Description of Data Collection and Procedures

The primary data collection included my written observational experiences collected in a daily reflective journal. I kept detailed notes on my daily observations and experiences related to my role as an assistant principal as both a self-participant and researcher. I self-reflected on my daily responsibilities, interactions, and observations while I carried out my assistant principal responsibilities and duties. Additionally, I documented and reflected on my perceptions of the interactions between me and my coparticipants in our real-world school environment. As both the observer and the participant, I took notes related to my own experiences and perceptions, not that of the coparticipants.

Starting on my first night in the position in August 2021, I began recounting my day's experiences. I sat at my computer nightly, where I recalled stories from the day and retold them in my journal. My journals were not longer than a half page, single-spaced, and typed in size 12 font. I jotted down bullets in a journal during the day, and at night, I expanded upon the stories. In this way, I recalled who was among the moments, where I was, what the dialogue entailed, and the emotions that were present.

When I typed out the full entry and looked at other artifacts from the day, I was able to also provide information about being effective or ineffective in the moment. As these journals unfolded, time and communication began to emerge as common themes. In addition, the journals allowed me to reflect in terms of my own actions, decisions, and the aspects of the job that I could and could not control.

The 180 daily reflective journal entries allowed me to identify areas where I gained leadership experience and areas where I needed more mentoring, training, and coaching. The entries also included my reflections regarding my own actions, decisions, and job-controllable experiences. The remaining data included 114 meeting agendas, one state-mandated turnaround plan, one targeted site visit report, and 11 months of personal calendars. These additional data sources enabled me to triangulate my journal entries over the 11 months of my first year of assistant principalship. I combined these data, which resulted in 131 vignettes that I used for analysis.

In order to protect the identities of the principal and another assistant principal in the building, I used pseudonyms when referring to them. I selected the name Jeff for the building principal and the name Linda for the other assistant principal in the building. These pseudonyms appear in all of the vignettes in the interpretation of findings section of this chapter.

Description of Analysis

I carried out the data analysis using a method known as inductive thematic analysis (Percy et al., 2015). After compiling all of the daily reflective journals into monthly personal narratives, inductive thematic analysis allowed me as the researcher to examine the gathered data in great depth in order to recognize recurring themes within the data that illustrated significant meaning in relation to the event (Percy et al., 2015). I adapted the following phases from the inductive thematic analysis approach that Percy et al. (2015) proposed: (a) getting acquainted, (b) coding, (c) grouping codes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) naming and defining themes, and (f) writing the report.

I began this qualitative ethnography participant observation study by writing daily reflective journals. After transcribing all daily reflective journals for the entire school year, I compiled them into monthly personal narratives. I wrote 11 personal narratives (August 2021 to June 2022) and then placed them into a template, dividing each paragraph into its own section. Using the themes from my literature review that highlight the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals, I created a color-coded key in which I highlighted and identified sections of the paragraphs that had been blocked out. The initial phase of coding consisted of the following color-coded key:

- monitoring student achievement (pink),
- providing instructional leadership (lime green),
- evaluating teachers (red),
- student discipline (yellow),
- fostering whole student (turquoise),
- challenges/role ambiguity (blue),
- workload/time-management (purple),
- professional development/mentoring/coaching (orange), and
- my value and work (green).

After color coding each of the narrative blocks, I reorganized all the data based on the colors, grouping each of the narrative block's respective colors together. After gathering all of the data in each of the color categories, I reorganized the colors into research question categories, which enabled me to determine if the data was relevant to the research topic. Then, I paired my categories down to three major themes: (a) clash of

values and expectations; (b) health, safety, and well-being; and (c) personal growth. Each of these three major themes enabled me to prioritize that category's data into three subthemes, where I was able to highlight the vignettes (i.e., raw and actual data) that I determined were most relevant to the research.

Once I had arranged the data by each of the main thematic categories accompanied by one of the three subthematic categories, I discarded the highlighted data that was unrelated to the study and saved the relevant data (Percy et al., 2015). As I reviewed each of the different groups, I was able to identify the most meaningful vignettes or personal narratives. Occasionally, I crafted vignettes within a single group by combining patterns, also known as groups of codes, with subjects that conceptually related to one another (Percy et al., 2015). After naming and defining the thematic topics and arranging the patterns and color codes to create vignettes, I created a study report to describe the results, highlighting the vignette and providing personal commentary and critique.

I explore these themes and subthemes in depth in the subsequent sections.

Presentation of Findings

While analyzing the journal entries, the following major themes and subthemes emerged: (a) clash of values and expectations; (b) health, safety, and wellbeing; and (c) personal growth. Three accompanying subthemes in the clash of values and expectations theme were: walkie-talkie, blurred lines, and going against the grain. The health, safety, and well-being theme included the subthemes of physical space, emotional reactions, and

personal trauma. The subthemes of the unknown, trial and error, and paving the way made up the last theme of personal growth.

This presentation of findings highlights the significant anecdotes that support each theme and the corresponding subthemes. Vignettes served as the ethnographic data. The 11 monthly data narratives included my experiences between August 2021 and June 2022. These themes highlighted the contrast between my rigorous training, experience, licensure process, coaching, and expectations for the assistant principal role and the actual position and duties associated with the assistant principalship. I use single spacing and block indenting to signify the vignettes.

Following the vignettes in each theme, I provide my present-day critiques and reflective observations. I double-spaced these critiques and presented them with traditional paragraph indentation. Five formatted asterisks separate each of the vignettes in each subtheme. The introduction and conclusion of the three main themes establish the subtheme organization. In each theme's conclusions, I present how the Massachusetts DESE's School Level Administrator Rubric is connected to the topics discussed in the vignettes and administrators' ability to grow as professionals.

The regulations in the Massachusetts DESE's School Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.) list broad areas of knowledge, abilities, and effective practice. Administrator standards included instructional leadership, management and operations, family and community engagement, and professional culture. This rubric described school-level administrative leadership. The principal or district administrator can utilize the rubric to evaluate assistant principals. This rubric may vary administrators'

duties. The Massachusetts DESE urged administrators and evaluators to apply the rubric strategically by discussing and deciding which indicators and elements should be prioritized based on that administrator's role, duties, professional practice, student learning, and school development goals (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). Performance descriptors are observable and quantitative assertions of educator actions and behaviors connected to each aspect and used to classify teaching or administrative performance as unsatisfactory, needing improvement, proficient, or exemplary. I chose to focus on proficiency when connecting the rubric to the three major themes and nine subthemes with the understanding that school leadership development is a continuum (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

When walking through the large rusted green doors of the urban PK–8 school for the first time, I observed the floor was inclined and bore a faded, painted rainbow across from the windows facing the school's courtyard. I was excited to begin my first day as an assistant principal and believed this was a good job fit. I enjoyed meeting the other leaders during the interview process and was excited that my commute was only 4 min.

Linda, our other assistant principal, greeted me. She led me up the "ramp floor," which led to a staircase. We took the stairs up, bringing us right to the school's main office. Linda explained that the principal's office looked strange as all the ceiling tiles had been removed to eliminate the mold that grew on them due to condensation from the air conditioning unit.

An office location had yet to be decided for me, so Linda walked me down the hallway to her office, which resided in the first-grade wing of the school. Walking down

the dimly lit corridor, I enjoyed seeing student self-portraits with “Hello,” written above them in their native languages. As a socially responsive educator and leader, I remember feeling like I belonged, and that the community was inclusive. I put my belongings in Linda’s office; then we headed to morning bus duty. I remember noticing how the two first-grade classrooms near Linda’s office were so clean and set up so nicely for these teachers’ students to arrive.

Entering Linda’s office, felt overwhelmed by the number of posters, notes, pictures, and artwork peeling off the cinder block walls as the construction tape was not sticking. Being a sweltering August morning, I used a tissue from my pocket to wipe off the little sweat making its way down my forehead. Linda handed me a walkie-talkie and told me it would be my radio for the year. I then followed her to find Jeff, the principal, who never responded to her page over the walkie-talkie.

Clash of Values and Expectations

The first theme, clash of values and expectations, highlighted the relevant data in three subthemes which surfaced in 81 out of 180 (45%) reflective journal entries across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study. First, in the walkie-talkie subtheme, I present data about communication. The second subtheme of blurred lines included the challenges and overall role ambiguity within the school. Third, the subtheme of going against the grain consisted of the lack of systems and structures coupled with the resistance to change for the better. Collectively, lack of communication, challenges and overall role ambiguity, and the absence of systems and structures as they pertained to the

assistant principalship depicted the clash of values and expectations I experienced during my first year as assistant principal.

Walkie-Talkie

In the subtheme, walkie-talkie, I present vignettes illustrating the issues with communication I experienced in my first year as an assistant principal. This section begins the clash of values and expectations theme to signify how important the communication experiences were for me. These data appeared in 19 out of 180 (10.5%) reflective journal entries and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study. Through the representative vignettes presented, I realized the importance of having communication plans and being transparent to function as an effective educational leader. The following vignettes illustrate this theme:

The staff reported back for the opening day's professional development day. The principal, Jeff, and Linda, the other assistant principal at the school, were more concerned with their costumes and the "Below Deck," theme that they had planned for the day. I was trying to understand the day's agenda. The agenda was still being revised in real time on Google Docs. Staff sat in the cafeteria with their groups that they fraternized with. I remember that Jeff and Linda were awkward and struggled with public speaking in front of the staff. Jeff spent the morning talking about initiatives for the year with "you need to..." statements. Several times when talking about expectations, Linda would also state, "you need to." When the staff asked follow-up questions or needed clarity, Linda would say, "that's in The Hub," which was a Google Doc with the pertinent links for staff. I had no idea what "The Hub" was, so I asked if Linda would share it, and she did. As someone new to the school, and thinking about the new staff, I was a bit surprised that this document was not shared out and reviewed in this setting. In addition, I was shocked that Linda had not shared "The Hub" with me during the two weeks we closely worked alongside one another leading up to this day.

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Our administrative team meetings take place on Mondays. As we came together for our first meeting, Jeff was creating an agenda as the school's leaders were sitting around the table. Much of the agenda was contents from Jeff's numerous emails from the night before with action items that he was unable to complete or work on from the week prior. A lot of the work for the week became the work that Jeff either did not attempt to work on or did not complete. This then became the work that he delegated to Linda and me to work on and complete. Like this meeting, other meetings throughout the week presented themselves in the same manner. No agendas were created ahead of time, no work was followed up on, and a great deal of notes were taken with no future direction and/or action items. Often Jeff would blame meetings as the reason for none of the work being completed. A lot of time during the week was wasted sitting around the table and not completing tasks. Often, I would ask questions, or make suggestions, only to be told, "No, we have already tried that." But when Linda spoke, Jeff would immediately agree, and then let her be in charge. My opinions were not considered.

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The guidance counselor is supposed to provide educators and staff with deadlines about progress reports and term grades. Neither the guidance counselor nor Jeff communicated information around the first progress report. Teachers were late submitting grades, the guidance counselor was late printing and preparing the reports to go home, and it seemed like the value of the grade was different depending on the class and teacher. When I asked to have a meeting with the guidance counselor about not following through with one of her responsibilities, Jeff said, "I will talk to her." Much like the talk with the guidance counselor, the talk with the custodian who was not doing his daily job along with the teacher who was coming into work late on a daily basis was similar. Maladaptive staff behaviors did not change and therefore I did not believe these issues were being taken seriously.

Effective communication allows assistant principals to receive vital information and establish trust and credibility between other leadership members and staff, all of which are vital for fostering productive relationships. As school leaders, using professional and respectful communication is crucial to fostering positive relationships. Through my experiences, I realized developing functioning professional relationships that

are built on trust and respect starts with developing strong communication skills.

Unfortunately, my communication-related experiences did not support my growth in this area. However, I did come to understand the value of effective communication in responding to conflict resolution. In all organizations, including schools, conflicts are inevitable. Good communication skills can aid the assistant principal in constructively resolving problems and becoming a valued member of the leadership team. By actively listening, clarifying misunderstandings, and collaborating to find a solution, the assistant principal can promote healthy connections and prevent problems from escalating.

By communicating with other educational leaders, teachers, parents, and students, the assistant principal can serve as a conduit who supports everyone in working toward common goals. Staff who perceive the assistant principal as approachable and respectful are likely to share their ideas and concerns, leading to enhanced decision-making and problem-solving. After my experiences, I will seek to communicate respectfully to influence the school's culture in a positive and supportive way. Educators who perceive they are treated professionally and respectfully are more likely to feel valued and motivated at work. I believe this communication will foster relationships, setting a positive example and boosting staff morale.

A new assistant principal facing the communication challenges described in the subtheme of walkie-talkie could be deterred from meeting a proficient rating associated with communication as described in the Massachusetts DESE's School Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). Leaders using the rubric evaluate assistant principals' communication under Standard IV: Professional Culture;

Indicator IV-C: Communications; Element 1: Communication Skills, where assistant principals demonstrate strong interpersonal, written, and verbal communication skills. Assistant principals and principals are proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they utilize strong interpersonal, written, and verbal communication skills to consistently and effectively communicate with stakeholders (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

After reflecting on the data, I realized that I lacked an experience in which I could utilize effective communication. I would have benefitted from having a communication plan with accompanied protocols. Implementing an on-call schedule and schedule times for conversations would maximize instructional leadership time, which can positively impact student achievement.

Blurred Lines

In the subtheme, blurred lines, I compiled the experiential vignettes illustrating role ambiguity and the challenges associated with my first year as an assistant principal. This section continues to explain the clash of values and expectations theme, showing the assistant principal's need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities to function and operate as an effective educational leader. These data emerged in 35 out of 180 (19.4%) reflective journal entries and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study.

Some students were told by Linda that they would be able to wear hoods, but hoods are not allowed in school, and this made the teachers upset. While Jeff was out with COVID-19, and Linda was left in charge, she thought that wearing hoods should be allowed in school even though it

violates the dress code policy. Linda wants this “new school policy” implemented because all of the eighth graders (a grade level in which she supervises) refuse to take their hoods off when she or another staff member asks. When this was discussed, everyone on the leadership team disagreed, but Linda refused to listen to anyone else’s opinions; thus, a change was made without the approval of Jeff, the building principal.

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I had emailed the teachers and staff on my supervision and evaluation caseload. I wanted to introduce the evaluation process to them, provide some reminders, and arrange a time to meet with them to check in and help them create educator goals. I had a schedule where teachers signed up, but sometimes I could not attend a meeting and needed to reschedule because I was being pulled in so many directions to support other people’s work. Often, I was directed to accommodate other people’s schedules and support their work.

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The guidance counselor went on leave the day before report cards were supposed to be sent home. The report cards had not been printed, reviewed, or distributed, so Linda asked if I would help her with this initiative. The guidance counselor is not held accountable when she does not complete a task or complete a task on time as she “has a lot going on outside of work.” To me that is not appropriate because we all have a job to get done, and if some are not held accountable, it forces others on the team to have to take on other peoples’ responsibilities.

For an assistant principal to develop strong connections with coworkers, they must have clearly defined duties and responsibilities. Defined roles and duties explain expectations and ensure everyone knows what they must do to contribute to the school’s success. A clear understanding of roles reduces uncertainty and irritation, enabling coworkers to collaborate more efficiently. Moreover, clearly defined expectations promote responsibility. When everyone understands their responsibilities, they are more likely to take responsibility for their job and hold themselves and others accountable for fulfilling their obligations. This accountability can assist in building an excellent and

high-performance culture while also promoting collaboration. Defined roles and responsibilities can facilitate teamwork among coworkers. When everyone understands their job, they may collaborate more successfully, capitalizing on their strengths and compensating for their deficiencies; this can foster a sense of teamwork and strong connections between coworkers. Having defined roles and tasks can also reduce conflict and contribute to a more harmonious workplace that encourages significant interactions.

A new assistant principal facing the challenges described in this study could be deterred from meeting a proficient rating associated with the job's roles and responsibilities as described in Massachusetts DESE's School Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). An assistant principal's growth in relation to roles and responsibilities is evaluated under Standard II: Management and Operations; Indicator II-B: Human Resources Management and Development; Element 2: Induction, Professional Development, and Career Growth Strategies where assistant principals are supported in implementing a cohesive approach to recruitment, hiring, induction, development, and career growth that promotes high-quality and effective practices. Assistant principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they (a) develop school-based induction support for new teachers or faithfully implement the district's induction strategy, (b) organize high-quality professional development that includes job-embedded and teacher-led learning opportunities that align with school and educator goals, and (c) support the career growth of effective educators by distributing leadership opportunities and monitoring progress and development (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

After reflecting on the data, I realized I lacked an experience that provided a clear organizational breakdown of the roles and responsibilities for all of the positions on the school's leadership team. I would have benefitted from having an organizational breakdown of each of the positions with accompanying roles and responsibilities. This breakdown would have provided me insight into who in the building was responsible for what. Having a roles and responsibilities organizer would enable an assistant principal to distribute the leadership team's necessary work evenly and provide workload equity. This would also assist in creating a system of accountability.

Going Against the Grain

In the subtheme, going against the grain, I composed vignettes illustrating the lack of systems and structures at the school that employed me. This section concludes the clash of values and expectations I experienced during my first year as an assistant principal. The fact that systems and structures were not in place or were bypassed by other leaders frustrated me. Leaders also excluded me from discussions regarding systems and structures, which likely led to my feelings of chaos and my view that these strategic processes did not exist. These data appeared in 27 out of 180 (15%) reflective journal entries and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study.

Systems and structures last a few days, and then Linda changes things up because they "don't work." However, these changes only come when Linda does not follow through on her responsibilities. Linda seems to blame the systems and structures for anything not working as planned, and then to retaliate she makes a change or revision to the system, structure, or protocol without any formal consultation or means of communication.

* * * * *

At no point in time was I able to have a discussion about these systems and structures, and because of how the messages were delivered, I remember feeling like I was not equal to the other assistant principal.

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Student support team meetings started. Jeff asked if I would facilitate this team and create a process for the school. The coaches' meetings still took place, and I found it inappropriate to hear that an agenda item was talking about the team's roles, responsibilities, and expectations. This frustrated me because I am the leader and facilitator of the team. In addition, Jeff and Linda do not know the current protocols that have been established this year for the student support team meetings.

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While I was trying to organize the Test and Stay program by setting up all of the pools for staff and students, the principal took it upon himself to change all the work that I had done because he "had a system that worked last year," and figured he would use it again this year. I had spent hours on setting up these pools and forms along with consulting with the school nurse for it all to go nowhere. Like the technology chaos in the beginning of the year, I was starting to see that there is limited communication, and a great deal of work happening without benefitting anyone, and people need to be efficient with their time.

Systems and structures give the school environment consistency and predictability. Leaders can reduce confusion and uncertainty by ensuring everyone knows what is expected of them and how processes should function. Systems and structures provide an accountability framework. Leaders can more easily hold individuals and teams accountable for their actions and results when they have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. In addition, systems and structures can promote fairness and equality in the school setting. For instance, having clear policies and procedures for disciplinary actions can ensure that all students are treated consistently and fairly. In conclusion, a school must have systems and structures because they provide consistency, efficiency, accountability, and fairness and can improve student outcomes. Well-designed systems

and structures help create a positive and supportive learning environment for students to succeed.

A new assistant principal facing the challenges described in this study could be deterred from meeting a proficient rating associated with the job's system and structures as described in Massachusetts DESE's School Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). Assistant principals' systems and structures are evaluated under Standard II: Management and Operations; Indicator II-A: Environment; Element 3: Student Health and Safety, where assistant principals develop and execute effective plans, procedures, routines, and operational systems to address a full range of safety, health, and emotional and social needs of students. Assistant principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they define high expectations for student behavior and provide training for staff to uphold these expectations. Proficient practice includes establishing school-wide routines, policies, and systems that (a) foster a safe and supportive school environment for all students and (b) prevent and address bullying and other unsafe behaviors in a developmentally appropriate way that allows students to grow from these experiences. Additionally, assistant principals who earn a proficient rating check for implicit and explicit bias in decision-making procedures (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

After reflecting on the data, I realized I lacked an experience with effective systems and structures. I would have benefitted from having established systems and structures as it would have provided me with consistency and predictability. I now know

to reduce any and all confusion and uncertainty by using effective communication and distributed leadership.

Conclusion

All of the data highlighted by the first major theme of clash of values and expectations represented all 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study, where 81 out of 180 (45%) reflective journals served as the data. The data revealed that the reality of the role I experienced during my first year of serving as an assistant principal did not match my values and expectations. A clear mismatch existed between my coaching, education, credentialing, experience, and training and what I witnessed. Communication, role ambiguity and challenges, and the lack of systems and structures coupled with resistance to change for the better created overall anxiety and chaos, which led to the development of the second major theme of health, safety, and well-being.

Health, Safety, and Well-Being

For the second major theme of health, safety, and well-being, I highlighted relevant data in three subthemes that surfaced in 75 out of 180 (41.6%) reflective journal entries across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study. First, in the physical space subtheme, I included data about the school's physical space, culture, and morale. The second subtheme of emotional reactions included the reactionary decisions and episodes of impulsivity that surfaced during my first year as an assistant principal. Third, the subtheme of personal trauma illustrated the way in which I suffered emotionally, mentally, and physically for 11 months as an assistant principal in this school and district. Collectively, the physical space, emotional reactions, and the personal

trauma associated with my assistant principalship depicted the issues I faced, which impacted my and others' health, safety, and well-being.

Physical Space

In the subtheme, physical space, I composed vignettes illustrating the issues with the physical school space I witnessed as a first-year assistant principal. This section begins with the risks associated with my colleagues' and my health, safety, and well-being to show how a school space can significantly impact all who occupy it. Prior to conducting this research, I did not understand how much a clean and organized physical school space would affect my role as an educational leader. These data emerged in 17 out of 180 (9.4%) reflective journal entries and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study.

The ceiling panels in Jeff's office needed to be removed as mold was growing on them. I was still working out of Jeff's office as he was still indecisive about where my office would be. For the opening days of school, I remember just sitting in the moldy office cataloging devices into the technology tracker that I was asked to work on. I had been taking my time doing this because I needed to cross-reference the assigned device's student identification numbers with the district's portal along with seeing what school the students had been assigned to. The ceiling panels and rug in my office were never removed like the principal had explained the week prior. As I cataloged devices, I would cough and need water. As we were nearing the end of the day, Jeff had walked down to my office to make sure that all the Chromebooks were delivered to classrooms. Jeff had explained how there was going to be a virtual open house for students, parents, and caregivers later in the evening. Jeff wanted me to help him with the presentation talking about curriculum and instruction. I was at the virtual open house from my home, and I remember part way through the event that I was not feeling well. My chest was tight, I was wheezing, and I was struggling to find air. Following the virtual open house, I went to my local emergency room where later I found out that I had mold spores in

my lungs. I was advised not to go to work the following day and start taking antibiotics.

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On a particular day where the snow was bad, the building started to flood and ruin six classrooms. When I say flood, I mean that each of these six classrooms had waterfalls coming down from their ceilings, and each of the classroom's floors had about two inches of water. This was due to a sprinkler malfunction, and everything in these classrooms got completely ruined. I felt bad for the teachers because all of their belongings and materials needed to be thrown away. Jeff was more concerned about supervision at the basketball game than the facilities issue.

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In addition to the daily crisis calls, by November there were already four student transports to the local hospital for severe psychological issues. Each time a student needed to be transported, we called a shelter-in-place to hold students in their current locations. We also faced complexities because we continued to operate without a school nurse as the school nurse was out. When the ambulance arrived, I was always told by Jeff that I needed to go with the student to the hospital as the district had a protocol that an administrator rides with a student being transported. Jeff would say, "you will be riding with them, and then you can text me to be picked up." My absence from the building would ripple to other areas of the building because we were already down staff with staff being absent, and because the school was operating with no substitutes. In addition, duties were not covered, teachers were not being evaluated, and no one was supporting my student discipline initiatives.

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The staff who help Jeff at the end of the day on their own time have decided that they will not help with parent pick-ups anymore because of the way Jeff speaks to them. This causes additional complications now because we were used to having three staff for support, and now they are no longer available. On a particular Friday, all of the paraprofessionals in the building were out on purpose because they knew that they would be pulled to substitute. Usually, there are about ten or more staff members out on Fridays, and we have no available substitutes for the many coverages; they are tired of being pulled for substitute coverage. In addition, the school's special education social worker was not servicing kids. In one week, three different teachers from three different grade levels came to tell

me that the special education social worker is not servicing kids. Since October, I have been bringing this issue and concern to the attention of Jeff.

School leaders must establish a safe and secure learning environment for students, faculty, and visitors. They must ensure the physical safety of the building and the safety of the people inside it. The assistant principal also takes responsibility for building safety by creating and implementing safety policies. The school's leadership must develop and implement safety policies and procedures to address emergencies, natural disasters, and other potential dangers. School leadership should conduct routine safety inspections of the school building and grounds to identify potential safety hazards or risks. This includes ensuring that all safety equipment (e.g., fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, and emergency exit signs) works as intended. Finally, to promote a culture of safety and security, the assistant principal should engage with the school community, including parents, students, and community members. This can involve encouraging students and faculty to notify school administrators of safety concerns or potential threats. In summary, all school leaders must ensure the safety of school buildings and must develop and implement safety policies, conduct regular safety inspections, establish and maintain emergency response plans, train and educate staff, and engage the school community to create a safe and secure learning environment.

In a school setting, leaders must have clear protocols for student emergencies to reduce confusion and panic and ensure everyone knows what to do and can act swiftly to prevent harm in an emergency. In addition, the law requires schools to ensure the safety of their students and employees. Having clear protocols in place can help school leaders

meet this requirement and protect them from liability claims in the event of an emergency. Through transparent protocols and procedures, students, faculty, and parents can develop trust and confidence because knowing that the school has an emergency plan can reassure individuals that the institution takes student safety seriously.

A new assistant principal facing the challenges described in this study could be deterred from meeting a proficient rating associated with maintaining a positive culture and climate in a schoolhouse as described in Massachusetts DESE's School Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). Assistant principals' culture and climate sustainability are evaluated under Standard II: Management and Operations; Indicator II-A: Environment; Element 1: Operational Systems and Routines. This element of the rubric requires assistant principals to develop and execute effective plans, procedures, routines, and operational systems to address a full range of students' safety, health, and emotional and social needs. Additionally, assistant principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they (a) establish operational systems, procedures, and routines that generally ensure orderly and efficient student entry, dismissal, meals, class transitions, assemblies, and recess; (b) effectively coordinate and support custodial and maintenance workers, transportation staff, clerical and administrative assistants, food service workers, and other staff; and (c) ensure the campus is clean, attractive, welcoming, and safe (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

After reflecting on the data, I realized I lacked an experience that had an effective and conducive physical space. I would have benefitted from having a more up-to-date physical space along with any and all safety plans. This theme illustrated to me that

leaders on an existing leadership team must orient new leaders about a school’s physical plant along with any and all existing safety and emergency plans and protocols.

Emotional Reactions

In the subtheme, emotional reactions, I composed vignettes illustrating the reactionary decisions and episodes of impulsivity that surfaced during my first year as an assistant principal. This section added the risks I encountered regarding the school’s cultural environment that related to our school community’s health, safety, and well-being. As a new assistant principal, I realized the importance of keeping emotions in check, being proactive, and staying rational. These data appeared in 23 out of 180 (28.7%) reflective journal entries and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study.

Jeff had a check-in meeting with me today, and he essentially explained that I will never be as good as Linda, that I should not seek validation in soliciting staff feedback with the survey that I created. Jeff then explained that he does not see me in the position for long, and that I should build relationships with staff (which I have), as he feels that I am not connected with the staff.

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What really seemed to bother me is that people outside of the administrative team seem to know about meeting agenda topics, and it is clear that Jeff and Linda are meeting with teachers before a leadership decision is made. Jeff and Linda do not address staff that are out of line, and this interferes with the shared accountability. Jeff directed me to be in charge of COVID-19 Test Distribution. This work will require three hours a week. I asked if we could all divide and conquer with this work, and I was told, “no.”

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If meetings were not successful, or if Jeff got aggravated, he was known to throw things in his office or pound his fists on his office's table while saying out loud, "For fuck sakes." The environment was never professional or comfortable during these times. Through conversations, Linda would always allude that Jeff would call her in the evenings to apologize for his behavior. Never once after any of these episodes did Jeff reach out to me and apologize for his unprofessional and childish behavior. These were more moments of highlighting how Jeff did not respect me.

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We had a social-emotional learning meeting with administrators from the central office to hear about an easy plan to roll out the new curriculum. Jeff interrupted the speaker and tried to complicate the roll out, and then the director of social-emotional learning said, "As an outsider, this is what your building looks like." Jeff then cut her off to disagree, and she responded with, "You guys need to start at ground level." Linda then said, "Our teachers are horrible and have no classroom management skills, and that's the problem."

School assistant principals must control their emotions to lead effectively, make sound decisions, resolve conflicts, and foster a positive school culture. As a leader within the school community, the assistant principal serves as a model for others. If the leader effectively manages their emotions, it can inspire others to do the same. Emotions can impair reasoning and result in rash decision-making. By controlling their emotions, school leaders can make more rational and effective decisions in the best interests of the students and their school. Emotions can escalate conflicts and make their resolution more difficult. By managing their emotions, the assistant principal can approach conflicts calmly and rationally, which can help to de-escalate the situation and illuminate an acceptable resolution for all parties. A school with a positive culture has a greater chance of achieving its objectives. By managing their emotions, school leaders can foster a respectful and supportive school culture in which all students feel valued and respected.

A new assistant principal facing the challenges described in this study could be deterred from meeting a proficient rating associated with decision-making as described in Massachusetts DESE's School Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). Assistant principals' decision-making is evaluated under Standard I: Instructional Leadership; Indicator I-E: Data-Informed Decision Making; Element 1: Data-Informed Decision Making, which requires assistant principals to (a) use multiple sources of evidence related to student learning, including state, district, and school assessment results and growth data and (b) to inform school and district goals and improve organizational performance, educator effectiveness, and student learning. Assistant principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they (a) use multiple sources of evidence, including state, district, and school assessment results and growth data, educator evaluation data, and school culture and climate information, to accurately assess and communicate the school's strengths and areas for improvement and (b) regularly use this data to make informed decisions related to organizational performance, educator effectiveness, and student learning (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

In addition, assistant principals' decision-making practice is evaluated under Standard I: Instructional Leadership; Indicator I-E: Data-Informed Decision Making; Element 2: School Goals, which requires assistant principals to use multiple sources of evidence related to student learning, including state, district, and school assessment results and growth data and (b) to inform school and district goals and improve organizational performance, educator effectiveness, and student learning. Assistant

principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they (a) involve stakeholders in creating focused, measurable school goals using evidence-based assessments of organizational performance, educator effectiveness, and student learning that will elevate both school and district effectiveness and (b) regularly monitor and share progress (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

After reflecting on the data, I realized I lacked an experience without the presence of reactionary leaders. I would have benefitted from having a leadership team with a proactive mentality and approach. I now know the importance of how systems and structures eliminate reactionary fixes and, in turn, eliminate confusion and uncertainty while promoting communication and collaboration among leadership team members. Additionally, researchers have associated higher morale with the school's climate and culture.

Personal Trauma

In the subtheme, personal trauma, I composed vignettes illustrating the emotional, mental, and physical experiences I encountered in my first year as an assistant principal. This section completes the presentation of data associated with the risks in the health, safety, and well-being theme. Overall, I realized how important it was for me to have emotional, mental, and physical well-being to serve as an effective educational leader. These data appeared in 35 out of 180 (19.4%) reflective journal entries and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) across the 11 months of my first-year assistant principalship.

Linda would change the duty schedule without consultation, and when I would confront her, she would say, "I am not going to consult you on

small decisions,” yet the decisions that she was making were disruptive to other parts of the building. When Linda would have issues with her students, she would continue to bring them down to my office for me to monitor and did not follow the student’s behavior plans. Linda would not take into account my schedule or calendar, and I was unable to visit classrooms to conduct evaluations because I was monitoring her students who were not regulated to be in class. Linda claims that we would discuss things as administrators, but really it was an e-mail with her decisions without any consultations or conversations.

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As a turnaround school, I started to really see why the building had complications turning around because of the lack of systems and structures along with no accountability. The day-to-day was always busy and reactionary, but I tried as hard as I could to follow my calendar. Several times, I would ask Jeff if this was a permanent position, and I asked if we could meet to talk about the organizational breakdown between Linda and myself. The principal told me “no,” and that the current organizational structure “is set up just fine.”

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When I got diagnosed with COVID-19, Jeff wanted to know my symptoms. Jeff did not trust that my test was positive, and that I was not feeling well. Jeff and Linda continued to text me when they knew I had COVID-19. Jeff emailed me requesting that I be working remotely to help teachers with TeachPoint as well as provide the leadership for COVID-19 at-home test distribution. I had to call him so that he could hear how sick I was, and to explain that I could not be working from home with COVID-19. The guidance counselor called me to tell me how much that the new walkie-talkie system that Linda recently created is not working and that there was no leadership available to help mitigate the problem. It has only been one week of this new walkie-talkie system.

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Jeff emailed me concerned that he had not heard from me in two days. I am sick in bed with COVID-19 and a fever. I have emailed and texted Jeff back, but he does not respond. I called my doctor, and he wanted me to stay out of work longer because of my symptoms. I notified Jeff, Linda, and Human Resources that I will be out of school longer than expected. I texted Jeff to let him know that I sent him an email. His text response to me was: “Ryan I saw your email. I am confused about why you need to

continue to quarantine, however. As long as you are fever free, you can be back sooner than 10 days. It is crunch time with budget, hiring, and evaluation. There has also been an uptick in student behavior. I was looking forward to having you back tomorrow.”

Culture and climate influence a school community’s learning environment and the experiences of students, faculty, and families. A positive school climate and culture can increase student achievement, positive relationships, and student well-being. On the other hand, negative school culture and climate can adversely affect student behavior, achievement, and well-being. A school’s administration plays a vital role in fostering and sustaining a positive school culture and climate. A school’s leadership team should articulate a vision and mission for the school community. Vision and mission statements should reflect the community’s values and beliefs and guide decision-making and actions to foster a positive culture and climate. To further create a positive culture and climate, the school’s leadership team should model positive behaviors such as respect, empathy, and inclusivity. When school leaders exhibit positive behaviors, they set the standard for the rest of the school community. After reflecting on the data, I realized that I lacked the positive experience that would have benefitted me more than a traumatic one.

A new assistant principal facing the challenges described in this study could be deterred from meeting a proficient rating associated with conflict management as described in Massachusetts DESE’s School Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). Assistant principals’ conflict management is evaluated under Standard IV: Professional Culture; Indicator IV-F: Managing Conflict; Element 1: Response to Disagreement and Conflict Resolution, which articulates that assistant principals should employ strategies for responding to disagreement and dissent,

constructively resolving conflict, and building consensus throughout a district or school community. Assistant principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they (a) regularly employ a respectful, nonconfrontational approach when responding to disagreement and dissent and (b) utilize a variety of strategies to resolve conflicts in a constructive manner (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

In addition, an assistant principal's conflict management is evaluated under Standard IV: Professional Culture; Indicator IV-F: Managing Conflict; Element 2: Consensus Building, which stipulates that assistant principals should employ strategies for responding to disagreement and dissent, constructively resolving conflict, and building consensus throughout a district or school community. Assistant principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they employ a variety of strategies to build consensus within the school community around critical school decisions (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

After reflecting on the data, I realized I lacked a positive experience that would have benefitted me more than a traumatic one, in which I felt taken advantage of and targeted. This theme helped me comprehend the importance of professional relationships and collaboration. I also gained an understanding of posttraumatic growth in understanding how relationships contribute to collaboration and the function of a team.

Conclusion

The data highlighted in the second theme, healthy, safety, and well-being, represented all 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study, where 75 out of 180 (41.6%) reflective journals served as the data. The data revealed that the reality of

the school's overall well-being and success during my first year as an assistant principal did not align with how I envisioned the physical space, culture, climate, and morale would be when serving as an instructional leader. The reactionary decisions, coupled with the emotional, mental, and physical trauma I experienced, led me to the development of the third major theme: professional growth.

Professional Growth

Throughout the third major theme, professional growth, I highlighted relevant data in three subthemes that surfaced in 64 out of 180 (35.5%) reflective journal entries and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study. First, in the subtheme of the unknown, I included data about what I did not know about the role and responsibilities associated with the assistant principalship. The second subtheme of trial and error included the systems, structures, and protocols I created on my own during my first year as an assistant principal. Third, the subtheme of paving the way included the coaching, mentoring, and support needed to help an assistant principal have an effective first year. Collectively, the unknown, trial and error, and paving the way highlighted the professional learning I needed to grow in the position and as a leader.

The Unknown

In the subtheme, the unknown, I composed vignettes that illustrate the unknown roles and responsibilities associated with the assistant principalship that surfaced in my first year as an assistant principal. This section focuses on the professional growth and continued learning that assistant principals need. Overall, I realized the importance of

clear and meaningful meetings and verbal and written messages and how important it was to me to know my responsibilities so I could be accountable and efficient in my role.

These data appeared in 22 out of 180 (12.2%) reflective journal entries and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study.

On the first day of school, Jeff and Linda had another meeting during the a.m. bus duty, so I was outside by myself confirming that all the buses had arrived and that all students were greeted. I wondered why I was not invited to attend the meeting with them, but Jeff said that he would “follow up with [me] later on.” Throughout the first day, the schedules did not make sense for teachers, the assigned duties were confusing for staff, and there was no opportunity for administration to meet in an assembly with the different grades to welcome them back. I have never worked in a school where there was not a welcome back assembly or fire drill practice, so I was unsure about how the students learn about the school’s expectations and safety protocols.

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When I arrived at the crisis team meeting, it was clear that there was no organization in terms of an evacuation plan. As a new member of the building, I had no idea what this process looked like in real-time. I had a lot of logistical questions, and it was assumed that I should have known because Linda shared a document with me back in August. I was told that it was in the document entitled “Holy Guacamole.” I did not know about it, and Linda had unshared documents because she did not want anyone to have access to it. Linda would constantly be revising and updating information. Much of the conversations that surfaced during the crisis team meeting were already conversations that had surfaced in previous meetings. It was at this meeting that I realized that there are so many meetings, yet everyone is confused, and time is not being utilized in an effective way. Like other meetings, there was a call for supporting a student, so I had to depart, and I was unable to return. When I followed up with Jeff after to see if this meeting could be collapsed and we could use part of our weekly administrator’s meetings for crisis updates, I was told, “no.”

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I was also unable to attend my two weekly common planning time meetings with educators because of the amount of student assistant calls and the many other needed tasks that interfered. It was not because I did not want to attend these meetings. No one was available to help me with the calls. The time for other school leaders to complete their work was always protected and uninterrupted. If I missed a common planning time meeting, I would e-mail the teachers and apologize for being unable to attend. The educators appreciated that I provided them with transparent communication. In addition, I would read through the agenda notes to ensure that I was up-to-date with what was being discussed in these meetings that I missed.

I found it frustrating that I did not know what the other leaders in the school were doing or discussing when I was busy with other responsibilities. I tried to keep myself informed by reading agendas, but the communication with the other leaders was minimal and often convoluted. Not knowing my responsibilities also led me to miss meetings with teachers, which teachers could have construed as unprofessional and frustrating. Having a clear division of labor and workload would have helped me know what I was accountable for and when, which could have helped me minimize mistakes. Without a clear division of labor and workload, assistant principals may become overburdened and stressed, leading to burnout and diminished performance. When assistant principals understand their roles and responsibilities, they are more likely to feel valued and satisfied with their work. A clearly defined division of labor and workload can allow assistant principals to develop their leadership skills and assume additional responsibilities. Creating systems of divided labor and workload for assistant principals can help maximize productivity, ensure accountability, foster teamwork, reduce burnout, enhance job satisfaction, and develop leadership abilities.

A new assistant principal facing the challenges described in this study could be deterred from meeting a proficient rating associated with communication as described in Massachusetts DESE's School Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). Assistant principals' communication is evaluated under Standard IV: Professional Culture; Indicator IV-C: Communications; Element 1: Communication Skills, which stipulates that assistant principals demonstrate strong interpersonal, written, and verbal communication skills. Assistant principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they utilize strong interpersonal, written, and verbal communication skills to consistently and effectively communicate with stakeholders (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

After reflecting on the data, I realized I lacked an inclusive experience and would have benefitted from having a leadership team that included me in meetings and communicated with me. An inclusive leadership team empowers all leaders with a clear mission and vision that prioritizes instructional leadership and maximizes student achievement. This kind of empowerment would positively impact school, staff, and student morale along with the school's overall culture and climate.

Trial and Error

In the subtheme, trial and error, I composed vignettes illustrating the necessary systems, structures, and protocols associated with the assistant principalship that surfaced in my first year as an assistant principal. This section provides further explanation of the professional growth and continued learning that assistant principals need. Overall, I realized that having structures and protocols enables administrators to be effective

educational leaders. These data appeared in 24 out of 180 (13.3%) reflective journal entries and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study.

At the end of my first week back after being out with COVID-19, Jeff kept me for close to two hours after school to tell me that he needs me to “exert [my] leadership muscles and step it up.” Jeff concluded the meeting by directing me to complete a task for him. Before leaving work, I had completed the task. Jeff continued to text me until 9:00 p.m. with changes and revisions that he wanted, and he ended the evening by telling me that he was "frustrated" with me.

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I was never asked about what support I needed, nor was I consulted when I would be unavailable due to work that needed to be completed in order to meet deadlines.

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The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System . . . documents that were sent out to staff were not accurate; teachers have zero clue about what to do, and the answer that Linda provides to people is always “it is in the update” or “I sent an email.” The communications are not easily accessible or clear, and everyone becomes frustrated, yet no one knows who is changing the information. When I checked the change history on the Google Document, I noted her name was always listed. As we continue to collaborate, I realized that [Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System] documents were not shared with me during one of our meetings. When I was trying to locate information, Linda expressed that the information was already shared with me, but in reality, it was not shared with me, and I know this because of the change history feature. Linda unshared the documents.

New assistant principals need professional development and mentoring to enable them to enhance their skills and knowledge and become more effective leaders who can improve outcomes for students and staff. Unfortunately, I did not receive professional development or mentoring. I was given tasks and expected to perform them amid various

changes that were sometimes not communicated to me. Therefore, the leadership team at my school left me to use my own knowledge to solve problems on my own. Other times, leadership communicated changes to me right up to the task's deadline. This moment-to-moment revision created problems because I work in a systematic and thoughtful way. Leadership skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and decision-making, contribute to an assistant principal's success. Instead, I learned what types of communication, problem-solving, and decision-making did not work for the school community. Assistant principals take partial responsibility for fostering a school culture that promotes students' learning and well-being. If I had received professional development and coaching to help me formulate strategies for creating and sustaining a positive school climate that promoted equity, inclusion, and student and staff well-being, I might have been more effective in my role and learned how to handle the tasks demanded of me.

A new assistant principal facing the challenges described in this study could be deterred from meeting a proficient rating associated with complying with the job's systems and structures as described in Massachusetts DESE's School Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). Assistant principals' systems and structures are evaluated under Standard II: Management and Operations; Indicator II-A: Environment; Element 3: Student Health and Safety, which requires assistant principals to develop and execute effective plans, procedures, routines, and operational systems to address a full range of students' safety, health, and emotional and social needs. Assistant principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and

element when they define high expectations for student behavior and provide training for staff to uphold these expectations. Proficient assistant principals must also establish schoolwide routines, policies, and systems that (a) foster a safe and supportive school environment for all students and (b) prevent and address bullying and other unsafe behaviors in a developmentally appropriate way that allows students to grow from these experiences. Successful assistant principals must also check for implicit and explicit bias in decision-making procedures (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

After reflecting on the data, I realized I lacked an experience where I received the mentoring and coaching that would have benefitted me. With that guidance, I would not have spent so much time considering systems and structures that had already been tried. I could have used that time to be an instructional leader to facilitate growth and development, which would have contributed to maximizing student success and positively impacting the school's overall culture and climate in ways that could increase staff and student morale.

Paving the Way

In the subtheme, paving the way, I composed vignettes illustrating the necessary coaching, mentoring, supports, and training that surfaced in my first year as an assistant principal. This section completes the professional growth and continued learning data that emerged during the data analysis. Although I needed support to develop my skills as a leader, as demonstrated through the previous vignettes, this subtheme included vignettes associated with my realizations about the importance of having coaching, mentoring, support, and training if I hoped to become an effective educational leader. These data

emerged in 18 out of 180 (10%) reflective journal entries and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) across the 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study.

I felt proud that I was able to make a plan and problem-solve on my own. As I reflected on the two opening weeks of school, I was amazed at how much work I was actually doing despite not knowing a lot. I was required to participate in or complete a lot of different things.

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By the middle of November, I was able to meet my deadlines for supervision and evaluation. I, too, was supposed to be evaluated, but Jeff never took the time to formally evaluate me. As an administrator in the building, I was able to see in the portal all of the evaluations of educators in the building. It was amazing that I was able to meet my deadlines of evaluating fifteen educators with all that I was juggling. Jeff had completed three out of 25, and Linda had completed six out of 18. I remember feeling like there was no sense of urgency, and that the other building leaders were not prioritizing instructional leadership which is the most important aspect of educational leadership. In addition, I felt bad for staff who were not getting the feedback that they deserved and desired—there was no accountability.

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A student pulled the fire alarm. After the alarm, a student confessed to pulling it when we were going back into the building. Jeff did not know the protocol for someone pulling the fire alarm, so I called the district's legal counsel, and she advised me. Jeff was upset that I sent a crisis incident report to the superintendent, which is required, and I have always done the crisis incident reports for the building following a critical situation. I asked Jeff if he put the superintendent on notice with what took place, and he looked at me and said, "Do I need to do that?" I responded with, "Yes." I emailed the superintendent for him. Jeff was the one who had originally explained this protocol to me. Back in his office, he went to his computer. When Jeff searched my name in his e-mail inbox, and I was behind him, I could see that there were about thirty emails that I had previously sent to him that were "unread."

* * * * *

There were two incidents that occurred in succession that made me feel like I needed to reevaluate my mentorship relationship. First, there was an incident with a parent where the parent meeting ended and the mom speeding off in her car and telling me to “shut the fuck up.” I really started to feel unsupported and not valued. So, I interviewed in another district to be a K–4 assistant principal. At first, I was unsettled with applying elsewhere, but when the second incident occurred with scheduling a 37-H hearing, I realized that I needed a stronger mentor in the field if I wanted to learn how to be a building leader and the correct way of doing things.

To promote a positive school culture and climate, the assistant principal and the school’s leadership team should provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. Professional development can help staff develop the skills and strategies necessary to foster a conducive environment for student learning. The school’s administration should encourage staff, students, and families to collaborate and communicate because these actions contribute to developing positive relationships and a schoolwide sense of community. The assistant principal and the school’s leadership team should respond to staff, student, and family concerns and suggestions. When school leaders listen to and respond to concerns and feedback, they foster a culture of trust and belonging.

School communities rely on their culture and climate as factors supporting student achievement, conduct, and well-being. The school’s leadership team plays a crucial role in fostering a positive culture and climate by establishing a vision and mission, modeling positive behaviors, providing professional development, promoting collaboration and communication, and responding to concerns and feedback.

A new assistant principal facing the challenges described in this study could be deterred from meeting a proficient rating associated with sustaining high expectations as

described in Massachusetts DESE’s School Level Administrator Rubric (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.). Assistant principals’ high expectations are evaluated under Standard IV: Professional Culture; Indicator IV-A: Commitment to High Standards; Element 1: Commitment to High Standards, which stipulates that assistant principals foster a shared commitment to high standards of teaching and learning with high expectations for achievement for all. First, this commitment involves following the school’s mission and core values by developing, promoting, and securing staff commitment to core values that guide the development of a succinct, results-oriented mission statement and ongoing decision-making. This commitment also pertains to meetings, where the assistant principal must plan and lead well-run and engaging meetings that have a clear purpose, focus on matters of consequence, and engage participants in a thoughtful and productive series of conversations and deliberations about important school matters. Assistant principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they foster a shared commitment to high standards of teaching and learning with high expectations for achievement for all (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

In addition, assistant principals’ high expectations are evaluated under Standard IV: Professional Culture; Indicator IV-A: Commitment to High Standards; Element 2: Mission and Core Values, which requires assistant principals to foster a shared commitment to high standards of teaching and learning with high expectations for achievement for all. This commitment pertains to the school’s mission and core values, for which the assistant principal must develop, promote, and secure staff commitment to

core values that guide the development of a succinct, results-oriented mission statement and ongoing decision-making. It also pertains to meetings in which the assistant principal plans and leads well-run and engaging meetings that have a clear purpose, focus on matters of consequence, and engage participants in a thoughtful and productive series of conversations and deliberations about important school matters. Assistant principals measure as proficient in this standard, indicator, and element when they develop, promote, and secure staff commitment to core values that guide the development of a succinct, results-oriented mission statement and ongoing decision-making (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

After reflecting on the data, I realized I lacked an experience that fostered the positive culture and climate I would have benefitted from as a new assistant principal. A positive culture and climate would have enabled me to see first-hand how these factors can motivate students to learn and inspire teachers to participate willingly in the active improvement of curricula. Additionally, having a positive culture and climate facilitates best practices within the classroom. I spent much of my time during my first year reacting to issues on a moment-to-moment basis, which hindered me from adequately learning the components that should have been prioritized in the role.

Conclusion

All of the data highlighted in the third theme, professional growth, represented all 11 months of the ethnographic qualitative research study, where 64 out of 180 (35.5%) reflective journals and material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) contained data addressing this theme. Through the data analysis, the

reality of the coaching, mentoring, and training I received during my first year as an assistant principal did not align with how I envisioned the growth and learning I would experience. First, I was unprepared for the unknown responsibilities and expectations associated with the assistant principalship and how communication emerged again as an important factor in the unknowns I experienced. Second, the implementation of the trial-and-error process associated with numerous systems, structures, and protocols that I developed independently, and professionally reflected on, did not always work out. Third, the lack of coaching, mentoring, support, and training helped me to realize the number of structures and supports needed by a first-year assistant principal to become an effective instructional leader.

Chapter Summary

The presentation of findings revealed the various roles and responsibilities encountered by assistant principals when providing instructional leadership and attempting to enhance student learning and achievement. The data indicated challenges and complexities resulting from a dichotomy between the values and expectations I envisioned versus the reality of the values and expectations that existed. Inconsistent and nontransparent communication, incoherent responsibilities, and resistance to change supported the notion that a clash of values and expectations existed within the assistant principal position and created unsafe and traumatic experiences for this first-year assistant principal.

Having a positive culture, climate, and morale can facilitate the functioning of collaborative, collegial, and safe schools. Assistant principals work toward creating a

physical space characterized by student discipline, teacher evaluations, and professional relationship-building with teachers, students, and parents. Proactive versus reactionary decision-making can ensure that decisions are data-informed and solutions-oriented, without emotions attached that could disrupt the emotional, mental, and physical well-being of all stakeholders.

The major themes and subthemes that emerged from the data in the study appeared in all of the 11 original monthly narratives (August 2021 to June 2022). These themes magnified the dichotomy between my own values and expectations of the assistant principal role and the realities of the role and its responsibilities at the school where I first served.

In Chapter Five, I interpret the data and, through the analysis, share the answers to my original research questions for this study. These answers allow me to connect my results to the implications that surfaced in my review of literature in Chapter Two. The intersection of both helped me outline new knowledge and define the significance of the study, its limitations, and the next steps for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In their first year, an assistant principal learns new responsibilities and expectations, gleans new understandings of their various roles, and adopts new processes to navigate this often stressful experience. Researchers have shown that first-year assistant principals feel confident and effective with adequate support and direction during this transition period; however, without the necessary mentoring, coaching, support, training, and structures, the assistant principalship leads to frustration, burnout, and turnover (Oliver, 2005; Retelle, 2010; Saphier & King, 1985). Effective induction and mentoring programs can help new assistant principals adjust by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and support they need to succeed in their roles. Researchers also have shown that effective mentoring and induction programs can improve job satisfaction, increase retention rates, and enhance job performance for new assistant principals. Most of the available research and training in the current literature focused on the principalship and not the assistant principalship, so this study helps to fill that gap through ethnographic research.

Due to the high rate of leadership turnover in urban PK–8 schools and the fact that most educational leadership programs do not specifically tailor training to the role of the assistant principal (Retelle, 2010), I determined a need for more insight and understanding of the assistant principal’s role to improve individualized training and support (Austin, 1972). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative ethnography was to understand an assistant principal’s leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school

environment and the coaching, mentoring, support, and training they need to succeed. The findings from this study have the potential to contribute to the knowledge base about the needs, training, and retention of new administrators in low-performing schools, especially assistant principals (McCarty, 2015; Saphier & King, 1985). This research is significant in the field of educational leadership because various roles and responsibilities were identified associated with the assistant principalship, highlighting the fundamental challenges associated with the position.

This ethnographic research took place in an urban city northeast of Boston, Massachusetts. I conducted this study from August 2021 to June 2022 in one of the city's PK–8 neighborhood schools. I compiled the daily reflective journals (i.e., stories, dialogue, emotions, and interactions) and relevant material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) into a monthly personal narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980). The data from the daily reflective journals were authentic and unfiltered. Together, the monthly personal narratives that evolved from these daily entries and the material data (i.e., existing protocols, calendars, meeting agendas, memos, and letters) allowed me to concentrate on what it is like to be an assistant principal in a school every day of the academic year (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Through the emerging narratives, I aimed to expose the complexities of the position and the critical systems, structures, and supports that hinder or facilitate assistant principal success and retention.

This chapter is organized into several sections. First, I discuss the conclusions related to the research questions and connect them to the relevant prior research. Then, I

present the implications, recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research, and limitations, which are all informed by the study findings. Finally, the chapter concludes with summative thoughts and conclusions, which bring together the entire ethnographic qualitative narrative.

Conclusions and Discussion

This study focused on the experiences, roles and responsibilities, challenges, and professional development and learning opportunities that an assistant principal must have to become an effective building administrator and retain the assistant principal position.

The following questions guided this study:

1. What are an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school environment?
2. Based on an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what systems and structures might build their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?
3. Based on an assistant principal's leadership experiences in an urban PK–8 school, what coaching, mentoring, support, and training might improve their leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership?

I provide the research analysis related to each of these research questions in the following sections, using headings to facilitate the organization of the responses.

RQ 1: What are an Assistant Principal's Leadership Experiences in an Urban PK–8 School Environment?

In this ethnographic qualitative research study, my experiences of being a first-year assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school environment fell into two categories: (a) dysfunctional and chaotic and (b) traumatic and unhealthy. Lack of opportunity for coaching and mentoring combined with ineffective organizational structures and systems contributed to these two problems. As the assistant principal, I experienced a general lack of organization and a sense of chaos as a result of the absence of procedures and processes. When responding to this question, I found the themes analyzed were rooted in the themes presented in Chapter Four. Specifically, this question highlights the identified themes of (a) clash of values and expectations; (b) health, safety, and well-being; and (c) professional growth. Additionally, this question highlights all of the identified subthemes included in all three of the major themes outlined in Chapter Four.

Dysfunctional and Chaotic Experiences

My leadership experiences were often dysfunctional and chaotic. First, the uncertainty, inconsistency, and unclear roles and responsibilities I encountered made it impossible to complete tasks and led to feelings of work overload. Due to the lack of time for collaboration and communication with the leadership team, I received more work assignments without clarification or models. The inconsistency and inequity on the leadership team created rifts in rapport and relationships among team members. These rifts led me to experience a lack of cohesiveness, cooperation, and communication with limited opportunities for collaboration.

I had a dysfunctional and chaotic experience, which is unsurprising given the prior research showing that work overload and role ambiguity cause challenges and conflicts. For example, in their qualitative research, Lim and Pollock (2019) determined that assistant principals experience a tough and burdensome workload due to the added tasks given to them by principals. Also, Kim (2019) discovered that assistant principals experience an increase in responsibilities outside their expected duties, which has a detrimental effect on them because they are unable to keep up with their other administrative tasks. Kim found that tasks unrelated to the assistant principal's actual roles and responsibilities were even more burdensome and resulted in their inability to be true instructional leaders. Differing from these qualitative studies, I used an ethnographic account that encompassed a year of my assistant principal experiences.

Traumatic and Unhealthy Experience

The second conclusion I drew from my leadership experiences included my encounters with traumatic and unhealthy situations. The workplace proved poisonous and unfavorable for my career development and overall health because the principal and assistant principal diminished my worth as an instructional leader and my voice as a leader. The lack of opportunities in which I could express my thoughts or show my previous background and expertise resulted in my principal taking advantage. Due to my diminished value, I experienced harsh physical work conditions, which led to my being hospitalized. Being devalued also resulted in my experiences with unnecessary, rude, and unprofessional relational situations with the other educational leaders. Taken together, my first year in the assistant principal role was traumatic and unhealthy, which hindered

me from carrying out my responsibilities.

Prior research has shown that when assistant principals are not valued or lack autonomy, they have lower job satisfaction. For example, Hansen (2018) explored the reasons rural school principals quit their jobs. Hansen discovered that assistant principals' work satisfaction was diminished by a lack of administrative authority, which is connected to being devalued. Liu (2020) qualitatively investigated the duties and responsibilities of the assistant principal, showing that principals have the primary authority. As a result, assistant principals lack autonomy, freedom, and discretion to carry out their responsibilities in accordance with their job specifications. Researchers have also shown that the contradictory job expectations placed on assistant principals in schools, in addition to role uncertainty, present substantial difficulties for them (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Garwood et al., 2018). Using an ethnographic account, I revealed the physical and psychological pressures and experiences assistant principals face. This personal narrative highlights the need for assistant principals to feel valued as professionals who enjoy autonomy, respect, and shared accountability. Importantly, the personal narratives included in this study revealed the overall toxicity I experienced. First, being in a mold-infected space and being hospitalized, all the while continuing to receive new task assignments from the principal over text messages, placed me in an untenable position. Second, my designation in a low-performing urban PK–8 school might have contributed to the psychologically unhealthy professional culture I encountered because state mandates heighten stress and anxiety for leaders working to address the needs of these schools.

RQ 2: Based on an Assistant Principal’s Leadership Experiences in an Urban PK–8 School, What Systems and Structures Might Build Their Leadership Capacity and Outlook on Educational Leadership?

The systems and structures that build a first-year assistant principal’s leadership capacity and outlook on educational leadership in an urban PK–8 school fall into two major categories: (a) designating time for instructional leadership and (b) incorporating professional collaboration and building relationships. Once I saw the limited systems and structures in place at my school of employment, I came to understand why the building had a turnaround plan guided by the state. Interestingly, the turnaround plan cited low-performing students, which leaders attributed to a lack of instructional leadership and a division among administrators on the leadership team. When responding to this question, I rooted the themes analyzed in those themes presented in Chapter Four: (a) clash of values and expectations; (b) health, safety, and well-being; and (c) professional growth. Additionally, this question highlights all of the identified subthemes included in all three of the major themes outlined in Chapter Four.

Designating Time for Instructional Leadership

Based on my leadership experience as a first-year assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school, I realized that I was never provided time to devote my energy to instructional leadership. One potential system and structure that could build a first-year assistant principal’s leadership capacity involves making instructional leadership a priority, especially in an urban PK–8 school. Having the ability to prioritize tasks and build my time-management skills would have helped me function as an instructional

leader. Instead, reactionary tasks dominated my experiences as I regularly responded to requests for work from the school principal, who took me away from my role as an instructional leader.

According to Liang and Augustine-Shaw (2016), assistant principals must continue to develop their skills in instructional leadership because it directly influences and impacts students' learning outcomes. Additionally, Tonich (2021) found that instructional leaders who support participation empower teachers to positively influence course objectives and assessments. With a focus on an assistant principal's experiences in an urban PK–8 school, the current study revealed the importance of dedicating time and support to instructional leadership. In this situation, I was unable to influence the teachers due to a lack of time resulting from the insurmountable number of tasks assigned by the principal. With time and support, I might have been able to foster teachers' instructional practices and boost students' outcomes. Unfortunately, the situational context and culture prohibited me from making progress with the heavy work required.

Incorporating Professional Collaboration and Building Relationships

My leadership experiences as a first-year assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school lacked opportunities for professional collaboration and the structure of relationships with members of the leadership team. Instead, I found my experiences on this team to be fractured and incohesive. Because of this division within the team, a system and structure that could have built my leadership capacity was to prioritize professional collaboration and building relationships. I lacked time to professionally collaborate with the leadership team, which would have enabled me to connect and build

rapport with the other team leaders. Because I lacked these connections, it became impossible for me to have difficult conversations, ask curious questions, and be able to hold the other members of my leadership team accountable for their roles and responsibilities. In addition, the division within the leadership team prevented me from trusting other members of my team, which took away from my own opportunities to reflect on my professional performance and learn from my fellow administrators.

These experiences of having blurred lines associated with the lack of structured professional collaboration and opportunities for relationship-building align with the research, which has indicated that without systems and structures around communication and connections, assistant principals cannot impact student achievement. Gumus (2019) discovered that assistant principals lacked access to professional collaboration opportunities that would have given them the power to influence organizational policies. Additionally, researchers have shown the importance of knowing how assistant principals must understand the inner culture and climate of the leadership team in order to become instructional leaders who influence and impact learning outcomes, school effectiveness, climate, and culture (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018; Gurley et al., 2015; Hallinger et al., 2020; Tonich, 2021). Through my experiences, I learned that effective and structured communication represents the first step in creating relationships in the workplace that are based on respect and trust. Unfortunately, a lack of communication hindered my progress in this area.

However, I did come to understand the value of structured communication when responding to conflict resolution. In all organizations, including schools, conflicts are

inevitable. My experiences taught me that I must communicate intentionally and politely to positively and constructively affect a school's culture. Teachers are more likely to feel appreciated and motivated at work if they believe they are being treated with professionalism and respect. This priority, in my opinion, will help me establish and promote relationships, set a good example, raise worker morale, and, in turn, impact the overall school culture.

RQ 3: Based on an Assistant Principal's Leadership Experiences in an Urban Pk–8 School, What Coaching, Mentoring, Support, and Training Might Improve Their Leadership Capacity and Outlook on Educational Leadership?

In this ethnographic qualitative research study, I found that my experiences of being a first-year assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school environment revealed that first-year assistant principals would benefit from having a robust induction program that includes coaching, mentoring, support, and training. More specifically, the robust induction and mentoring program should include the following categories: (a) a full-time practicum or apprenticeship; (b) an orientation to the district, school, and field guides; (c) a robust induction and mentoring program incorporating a communication plan; and (d) a professional learning support cohort or administrator coach who can provide additional avenues for self-selected support. When responding to this question, I rooted the themes analyzed in those themes presented in Chapter Four. Specifically, this question highlights the identified themes of (a) clash of values and expectations; (b) health, safety, and well-being; and (c) professional growth. Additionally, this question highlights all of the identified subthemes included in all three of the major themes outlined in Chapter Four.

Full-Time Practicum or Apprenticeship

First-year assistant principals would benefit from a full-time practicum or apprenticeship experience prior to entering their first position. Barnett et al. (2017) asserted that a full-time practicum or apprenticeship could provide assistant principals with the practical experience, mentorship, coaching, networking, and professional growth they need to be effective in their position. The authors claimed such an opportunity would enable the assistant principal to gain the experiences and abilities necessary to perform their duties effectively, allowing them to apply their knowledge in real-world situations. In addition, these first-year assistant principals would be exposed to new ideas, approaches, and best practices in school administration. Barnett et al. explained this exposure also allows new assistant principals to experience a building's climate and culture. Unfortunately, my practicum was not full-time because I taught at the same time. Consequently, I could not immerse myself completely and did not enjoy the exposure necessary to understand the various roles, responsibilities, and communication strategies essential for my development.

Orientation to the District, School, and Field Guide

Based on my leadership experiences as a first-year assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school, first-year assistant principals would benefit from participating in an orientation for both the district and the school to give them a better understanding of the climate and culture of both the district and the school (Burkhauser, 2017). In addition, the assistant principal should receive a manual, field guide, or handbook that includes district protocols, contracts, and forms; school and district improvement plans; and technology

use policies. Collectively, these systems and structures will guide and support the assistant principal's work in both the school and district (Cohen & Schechter, 2019; Cosner et al., 2015). I did not have access to formal district, school, and field guide orientations. Additionally, orienting assistant principals in stakeholder relations and communication can improve the learning environment at schools with high student achievement (Cunningham et al., 2019).

Robust Induction and Mentoring Program Incorporating a Communication Plan

Based on my leadership experiences as a first-year assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school, first-year assistant principals would benefit from structured mentoring and communication protocols. A list of the priorities, expectations, and tasks for each month of the academic year and clearly defined roles and responsibilities associated with them, would make the assistant principals more apt to build connections and communicate effectively, leading to an increased impact on school culture (Cunningham et al., 2019; Hayes & Burkett, 2021) and student academic achievement (Borkar, 2016; Hayes & Burkett, 2021). First-year assistant principals also would benefit from (a) having opportunities to observe and shadow their mentor and other building leaders and (b) having opportunities to observe other leaders facilitating discipline hearings, parent meetings, and meetings with faculty and staff. These leaders can observe experienced administrators, acquire exposure to all facets of school administration, and build the necessary skills and competencies for success (Barnett et al., 2017; Lochmiller & Karnopp, 2016).

Professional Learning Support Cohort or Administrator Coach

Based on my leadership experiences as an assistant principal in an urban PK–8 school, first-year assistant principals would benefit from participating in a robust professional learning and support cohort model. Having a robust professional learning and support cohort model specifically designed for assistant principals would provide additional avenues for first-year assistant principals to advocate for their own supports (Cunningham et al., 2019). By including other building or district assistant principals, mentors, coaches, and district leaders, assistant principals could increase their learning capacity by building professional relationships and rapport (Cosner et al., 2015). This process would enable assistant principals to identify improvement areas, establish development objectives, and select intentional supports as they move toward their goals (Cosner et al., 2015). In turn, this process would create a learning community and support network for the novice assistant principal.

Summary

My first year as an assistant principal taught me about what not to do as a leader as I observed the dysfunctional, chaotic, traumatic, and unhealthy behavior demonstrated by the school's principal and the other assistant principal. In addition, this exploration helped me realize that a good school assistant principal must work at transforming the work and learning conditions in a school. This transformation happens through the building of strong, trusting relationships and professional rapport. This transformation, then, has a ripple effect that shifts educators' mindsets and builds their capacity to be an integral part of the school's transformational change. Had I had (a) a full-time practicum

or apprenticeship, (b) an orientation to both the district and school that included a field guide, (c) a robust induction and mentoring program incorporating a communication plan, and (d) a professional learning support cohort or administrator coach my experience as a first-year assistant principal would have provided me with positive professional growth rather than a negative experience that left me to learn on my own. However, I embraced the challenges rather than resisting them. I believe that, in the end, my dysfunctional, chaotic, traumatic, and unhealthy experience as a first-year assistant principal truly taught me the importance of being an instructional leader who fosters professional collaboration and relationship-building. Ultimately, this negative experience allowed me to become a better assistant principal and leader.

Implications

Many implications evolved from this research study that can impact how schools and districts can effectively hire, coach, mentor, support, and train first-year assistant principals. In addition, this study will help ensure that best practices transfer to other departments, schools, and districts. Schools and districts must engage in this critical work of hiring, coaching, mentoring, supporting, and training new educational leaders because the assistant principalship functions as the gateway to all other educational leadership positions. This research study showed that the following induction and mentoring elements for first-year assistant principals are integral in the leader's efficacy and retention:

- First, educational leaders must ensure that first-year assistant principals have an orientation that details preferred methods of communication, establishes

professional rapport, creates coherence, and makes introductions that help build and support personal relationships that transfer to the job.

- Second, leaders must ensure that first-year assistant principals have a robust induction and mentoring program where they have an assigned mentor for at least the first 2 years in the position, accompanied by a program structure with other new leaders in the district.
- Third, leaders must ensure that first-year assistant principals have time for collaboration. First-year assistant principals need time to collaborate with their assigned mentor, coach, and support group or cohort.
- Fourth, educational leaders must ensure that first-year assistant principals have clearly defined job roles and responsibilities.
- Fifth, school leaders must ensure that first-year assistant principals have and understand the school and district protocols. First-year assistant principals need training and support around any and all school and district systems and structures.
- Sixth, leaders must ensure that first-year assistant principals have a detailed field guide with relevant information pertaining to school and district priorities, protocols, documents, state and local policies and laws, and other essential resources.
- Seventh, educational leaders must ensure that first-year assistant principals have professional learning time and experiences. Professional development or a leadership academy cohort model can provide ongoing and collaborative

professional learning time and collaboration with other school and district educational leaders.

- Eighth, leaders must ensure that first-year assistant principals have an administrative coach. This coach should not be the assistant principal's supervisor or assigned mentor, and the coach should take responsibility for the teaching and training associated with the assistant principalship.
- Last, school leaders must ensure that first-year assistant principals have daily and weekly one-on-one time set aside with the building principal to both process information and ask questions.

These implications all fall within the scope of the district's abilities, and they represent critical factors for assistant principal success. Effective hiring, coaching, mentoring, supporting, and training of first-year assistant principals can lead to retention and promote these educational leaders, who will then have experience and knowledge relevant to the school and district. The next section adds to these implications by presenting recommendations for practice and further study that might inspire additional research on this topic.

Recommendations for Practice

By offering incoming assistant principals a thorough multiyear mentoring plan, schools may ensure assistant principals a smooth transition into the role and position them for long-term success as school leaders. The following recommendations for practice emerged from this qualitative research study:

- First, school leaders should ensure that schools offer incoming assistant principals a complete induction plan to help them succeed in their new roles. This induction strategy should involve orientation, mentorship, professional growth, and assistance with relationship development. Initially, the new assistant principal should be introduced to the school and district, including regulations and procedures, school culture, and the community served by the school.
- Second, school leaders should allocate an experienced administrator who can serve as a mentor for the new assistant principal. This individual should guide and encourage the assistant principal during their first year on the job.
- Third, school leaders should ensure that the new assistant principal is equipped with a clear professional development plan that promotes their growth as a school leader. The new assistant principal should benefit from regular professional development opportunities. These could include workshops, conferences, and other forms of training. Goal-setting and evaluation represent other essential components. The new assistant principal should participate in the goal-setting and evaluation processes, collaborating with their supervisor to develop goals and track progress toward them.
- Fourth, school leaders must ensure that the new assistant principal receives assistance with developing relationships with staff, students,

families, and community members. This assistance may include opportunities to meet with stakeholders, attend school activities, and participate in community outreach efforts.

- Fifth, school leaders must give incoming assistant principals a multiyear mentoring plan to help them succeed in their new roles. This strategy should incorporate the following elements:
 - a. Appointment of a mentor: The new assistant principal should be allocated a mentor who will provide guidance and assistance throughout their first year on the job.
 - b. Mentoring for at least 50 hr after the induction year: The new assistant principal should get at least 50 hr of mentorship after their first year in the post. Their chosen mentor or other qualified administrators should provide this support.
 - c. Support group: The new assistant principal should have a support group. The support team should advise and assist the new assistant principal as they work toward their professional goals. The new assistant principal will benefit from having a coach or consultant other than their supervisor or assigned mentor for additional teaching and training pertaining to the assistant principalship.

- d. Mentor training program: The mentor should participate in a mentor training program to ensure they are prepared to effectively serve the new assistant principal.
- e. Mentor accountability: The mentor and incoming assistant principal should have a clear plan for accountability that includes goals, expectations, and support schedules.
- f. Establish a meeting schedule for the support team: The support team should meet regularly to discuss the new assistant principal's progress and to provide continuous direction and support. This element could also follow a leadership academy cohort model.
- g. Mentor and mentee release time: The mentor and incoming assistant principal should have time off from their regular duties to engage in meaningful mentoring interactions.

Schools can help ensure new assistant principals' seamless transition into the new job and set them up for long-term success as school leaders by providing them with a comprehensive multiyear mentoring plan.

Recommendations for Future Research

Assistant principals play a critical role in promoting a school community's success, and numerous research areas can benefit their professional development. The following recommendations for future research emerged from this qualitative research study:

- Future researchers should explore the impact of mentorship and coaching on the professional development of assistant principals, including the advantages of one-on-one mentoring, peer coaching, and other forms of assistance.
- A need also remains for research focused on leadership development. For example, the effectiveness of various leadership development programs for assistant principals, including the impact of workshops, conferences, and other professional development opportunities, could be investigated.
- Research on evaluation and feedback could illuminate the role of feedback and evaluation in assisting assistant principals' professional growth and development. Such research could also shed light on the effectiveness of various evaluation models and strategies.
- Future researchers could also study diversity and cultural competence as they relate to the role of the assistant principal. Research in this area could also address the impact of cultural responsiveness training and other initiatives on the assistant principal's ability to effectively lead and support diverse school communities.
- More could also be learned about the assistant principal's role in developing leadership skills in teachers and staff. In this area, researchers could focus on the role of assistant principals in assisting teachers and other staff members with their professional development and the effectiveness of coaching, mentoring, and other support strategies.

- Last, future researchers could conduct an interpretative phenomenological analysis study around this same study's topic; however, the investigation would provide nonemotional findings.

These potential research areas could benefit assistant principals' professional development and contribute to understanding the unique challenges and opportunities that assistant principals face. Such understanding would support the ongoing growth and development of assistant principals as educational leaders.

Limitations

This ethnographic qualitative narrative research study had the following limitations. First, the research was limited to one urban PK–8 neighborhood school in an urban city northeast of Boston, Massachusetts. Second, the inquiry spanned just one academic year (i.e., 11 months from August 2021 to June 2022) because that was the first year of my assistant principalship. Third, I limited this investigation to only one urban PK–8 neighborhood school because my position was designated to only one school within the larger school district. Although I included only 1 year within one learning community, these boundaries represent a typical first year for assistant principals. Fourth, this study only included the single perspective of the researcher; however, this limitation is consistent with ethnographic research in which the author uses self-reflection and personal experiences to investigate and comprehend a cultural phenomenon or social issue. Although ethnography can provide valuable insights into the subjective experiences of individuals and groups, the ethnographer cannot generalize findings to the population of assistant principals. Additionally, ethnography derives from the author's

personal experiences, so there exists a possibility for bias to affect the interpretation of data. However, to address this potential, I described my personal beliefs, experiences, and cultural background in the position statement. The fifth and last limitation of this qualitative narrative inquiry research study involved the study's placement in the year following the nontraditional academic year that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, officials converted schools into urgent care and testing sights. This disruption took away from the instructional leadership and coaching that might have been present under other circumstances. Additionally, COVID-19 impacted my health, safety, and well-being as I myself was exposed to the virus and was required to be out of work.

Final Thoughts and Conclusions

An assistant principal candidate's success and retention requires first-year assistant principal orientation and mentoring (Oliver, 2005; Retelle, 2010; Saphier & King, 1985). Such an established program in a school would allow novice leaders and new administrators, also new to the district, to gain experience in both the school and district with the assistance and support of their professional peers (Oliver, 2005; Retelle, 2010). In addition, this study provides essential data because all new assistant principals need support and inside knowledge about their job within the building and about their function as district educational leaders (Oliver, 2005; Retelle, 2010). However, when effective mentoring and coaching are absent, a first-year assistant principal can become overwhelmed and unproductive, hindering professional growth.

In a key highlight of this ethnographic research study, I realized that there was a

disconnect between my rigorous training, experience, licensure process, coaching, and expectations and what I experienced in practice. A major takeaway for me involved figuring out how the conflict between expectations and reality impacted my abilities and performance. I experienced a constant internal conflict between my desire to make decisions guided by ethics, laws, and morals and the imperative that I do what I was told to avoid being insubordinate to my principal (i.e., my boss).

I realized that my work environment was a bad fit that hindered my professional growth because of how the other school leaders devalued my role as the additional assistant principal. Job alignment contributes to an individual feeling supported and valued in their work. I am a collaborative, productive, and essentially happy person. In the absence of those important features, I realized that I needed to look for a different setting. When I am valued and supported, I have higher levels of satisfaction in my work; I communicate more effectively with fellow collaborators, and I have greater levels of creativity and innovation. With the latter, I work more effectively as a leader on a team because it allows me to establish an inclusive climate and culture. This research reinforced how important professional relationships are among educational leaders on a leadership team, and it demonstrated how leaders must communicate when facing conflicts in day-to-day school occurrences.

As I reflect on that year, I realize that I could have done some things differently. I think I could have proposed a sit-down, solutions-oriented conversation with the building's principal and the other assistant principal to work toward a positive, professional working environment. I think I could have been more flexible in my role in

terms of the school-wide initiatives I disagreed with. Often, Jeff and Linda wanted to do school-wide scavenger hunts or school-wide obstacle courses in the gym, but this became a regular occurrence with no prior planning. Teachers would come to me to explain their frustrations, and I would attempt to bring forth their concerns. In retrospect, my communication in those moments could have emphasized seeking understanding versus simple disagreement.

I experienced one bright light in this challenging role. In a short amount of time, I earned respect from the faculty and staff, students, and families. The students and staff made each day of work meaningful for me. Teachers enjoyed the collaborative nature of my supervision and evaluation approaches, and often, they asked me to be a classroom reader. These interactions represented the highlights of my experience that year.

As a classroom reader, I connected with the students and got to know them as people. These students shared stories, drawings, and sometimes snacks, but most importantly, they met my high expectations by following the school's rules and policies. I had the ability to hold students accountable for their actions and was able to educate them about inappropriate behavior. I also guided them in restorative practices to help them become better community members. In return, teachers liked my level of accountability and my efforts to follow up with them.

My big takeaway from this study is that I aim to be a true teacher of teachers. Being in the classroom as an English teacher with a rigorous standards-based curriculum prepared me to be an empathetic leader. As a teacher, I also gained the confidence needed to make decisions, which propelled me to enter my own educational leadership path

because I believed I saw gaps in organizational systems and structures. Being an instructional leader allowed me to support other educators and to create the systems needed to make a teacher's day easier and more productive. With strong systems and structures, teachers can focus on the real work of educating students.

I learned my strengths and value at the school where I served in my first year as an assistant principal when all of the teachers arranged a farewell dinner in my honor. The authenticity and meaningfulness of the event really touched me. At school, I always used an orange, felt-tipped pen when I wrote. The teachers had purchased a box of these orange pens, and many teachers expressed sadness that I was departing. I know that these relationships were meaningful because several teachers have kept in touch with me this year. If they are not asking for support with writing their goals or collecting evidence, then they are reaching out to me to ask me how I am doing on my research project. Building professional relationships such as these provides needed support to teachers, which was evidenced by their actions and words of appreciation.

The methodology of this research project provided me with a therapeutic process. Ethnography allowed me to write, rewrite, reflect, and write again. As much as it was therapeutic, I realized that this qualitative data is hard to analyze because of the multiple procedures. Often, I needed to write, revise, and rewrite sections so that I could organize them appropriately into a code. When at the point of selecting vignettes for my themes and subthemes, I had an extremely difficult time eliminating irrelevant data. I realized that I struggled to eliminate that data because I had become so close to it, and the data represented my real life.

In the future, this research may prompt schools and districts without an embedded or established induction and mentorship program for educational leaders (i.e., first-year assistant principals) to assess if it is worthwhile to implement such a program in order to ensure effective educational leadership. Researchers and school districts may be able to establish which elements positively influence an assistant principal's views and beliefs regarding their position and school district. With the appropriate supports and shared values of team members, the educational leader (i.e., the assistant principal) will more likely want to stay in their position or at least achieve a level of satisfaction in the role. Furthermore, they may work harder and see themselves as a team player who extends themselves to build a community of learning with a positive climate and culture woven among all of the stakeholders and throughout the schoolhouse.

One of the limitations of this research was that it involved the story of one school's leadership processes and culture. All schools and school leadership differ, so I deemed it important to focus the takeaway on the findings and not on the contextual information and demographics of the school. Through these experiences and others, I want to help educational leaders in all types of schools and cultures.

As a researcher and investigator and as part of this dissertation, I constructed an *Assistant Principal Field Guide* (see Appendix) to serve as a coaching workbook for first-year assistant principals. I intended this workbook to serve as a guide that orients new educational leaders to their roles. Novice assistant principals can use this field guide as an action item checklist to complete with their district-assigned mentors. In addition, this field guide offers insight into what a support group cohort model could look like.

APPENDIX: ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL FIELD GUIDE

This field guide is for first-year assistant principals. The contents in this field guide have been produced based on the findings and conclusions of this research. I have also included connections between the recommended steps and (1) the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and (2) the relevant prior research critiqued in this dissertation. Not only would these processes have benefitted me during my first-year as an assistant principal, I aim to continue updating them in lieu of new research and new experiences. I first present the recommended steps as a whole. Then I discuss each step in detail.

As a new assistant principal beginning work in a Massachusetts urban school, you may wish to consider the following:

1. **Create an entry plan that maps out how you will connect with the school community:** Acquaint yourself with the students, teachers, staff, and families that comprise the school community. Participate in school events, meetings, and conversations with stakeholders to better understand their needs and expectations (Section #1 Below).
2. **Understand the school's culture and climate:** Every school has a distinct culture, and it is vital to understand the culture of the school where you work. Learn the school's values, norms, and traditions by observing how things are performed (Section #2 Below).

3. **Know the rules and regulations:** Acquaint yourself with the school and district's policies and procedures. Ensure that these policies and procedures are followed, and that teachers and staff know and understand (Section #3 Below).
4. **Foster student relationships:** Students are the focal point of the school community, so it is essential to develop positive relationships with them. Be approachable, visible, and supportive of their interests and needs (Section #4 Below).
5. **Create time for collaboration:** As an assistant principal, you will collaborate closely with teachers and staff. Collaborate with them to establish a positive learning environment for students and be open to their ideas and feedback. Listen actively to feedback and concerns and be open to suggestions for improvement. (Section #5 Below).
6. **Deal with discipline and restorative practices:** Take a proactive approach to discipline issues. Urban schools frequently face unique challenges regarding student behavior. Develop a proactive strategy for addressing discipline issues and collaborate with teachers and staff to establish clear student expectations and consequences (Section #6 Below).
7. **Engage with families and community members:** Engage with families and community members in order to create partnerships and a sense of community within the school. This can facilitate student learning and academic success (Section #7 Below).

8. **Keep abreast of education trends:** Keep abreast of current education trends and best practices. Enhance your skills and knowledge by attending conferences, reading professional literature, and participating in professional development opportunities (Section #8 Below).
9. **Create a communication plan:** An assistant principal's communication skills are crucial in an urban school. Building trusting relationships with students, faculty, parents, and the community requires good communication skills. Communication with various stakeholders, such as, - district leaders, leadership team, staff, teacher, student and family will require different modes, methods, and styles of communication. It is imperative that time is taken to identify and plan for ways to communicate with all the stakeholders in a community. Communication-skilled assistant principals can resolve conflicts and benefit all parties. Assistant principals must provide feedback to help teachers, staff, and students improve. Effective communication is needed to give positive, constructive feedback. Assistant principals must regularly inform students, staff, parents, and community members. Effective, precise, and timely information sharing requires good communication skills (Section #9 Below).
10. **Dealing with Crisis:** Ensure the calm and safe removal of students and staff; understanding and executing crisis plans (Section #10 Below).

Section #1: Familiarize yourself with the school community: A new assistant principal in an urban school can become acquainted with the needs and expectations of the school community in many valuable ways:

- Attend school events and get to know students, families, and staff in a more relaxed setting can be accomplished by attending sporting events, concerts, and plays.
- Attend faculty meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and other gatherings to learn about the communication policies and culture of the school. *(Faculty meetings are mandatory, so perhaps attend family events for parents, such as experts sharing parenting tips for online usage and safety, discipline, and get to know what are important issues for families)*
- Spend time in classrooms observing teaching and learning to gain knowledge of the instructional strategies used and the difficulties that teachers and students encounter. *The same can be said about getting to know the children, so children do not only see you when there is a discipline issue but also as someone who cares and will advocate for them.*
- In order to learn more about the school's strengths and areas for development, administer surveys to students, families, and staff.
- To better understand the history and culture of the school, conduct interviews with the teachers, staff, and families.
- Reach out to local business owners, religious leaders, and elected officials as community leaders to establish connections and promote collaborations.
- Students being followed for a day can learn a lot about what it is like to be a student and their difficulties.

A new assistant principal can better understand the needs and expectations of the school community by following these steps. As a result, they will become known as a capable leader dedicated to meeting the school community's needs.

Section #2: Understand the school's culture and climate: In order to become acquainted with the school's culture and climate, a new assistant principal at an urban school should take the following steps:

- Observe the school's physical environment, including the classrooms, hallways, and common areas. Examine bulletin boards, posters, and student artwork to indicate school culture and climate.
- Review school documents to gain insight into the school's values and expectations. Compare what they see and what is written to figure out the work that still needs to be done regarding values reflected in the classroom and throughout the building.
- Speak with staff members to learn about the culture and climate of the school. Inquire about the school's strengths, challenges, and improvement opportunities.
- Meet with students: Meet with students to learn about their experiences and perspectives regarding the culture and climate of the school. Inquire about their favorite aspects of the school and their suggestions for improvement.
- Analyze school data, such as attendance, discipline, and academic performance, to gain insight into the climate and culture of the school.
- Attend school events, such as assemblies, sporting events, and performances, to understand the school's culture and climate.

- Conduct administrator surveys to students, families, and staff to collect feedback and insights about the culture and climate of the school.

A new assistant principal can comprehensively understand the school's culture and climate by following these steps. This will allow them to collaborate effectively with staff, students, and families to create a positive and supportive school environment that fosters academic success for all students.

Section #3: Know the policies and procedures: A new assistant principal in an urban school can take the following steps to familiarize themselves with the school's policies and procedures:

- Examine school documents and review the school's handbook, policy manual, and other pertinent documents to understand its policies and procedures.
- Meet with the principal to discuss the school's policies and procedures and to clarify any questions or concerns.
- Observe the staff to ensure compliance with school policies and procedures, such as attendance policies and classroom management protocols.
- Attend meetings with staff and administrators to learn about curriculum, instruction, and student services policies and procedures.
- Participate in professional development opportunities for professional development related to policies and procedures, such as workshops or training on student privacy laws or school safety protocols.
- Request feedback on the effectiveness of the school's policies and procedures from staff, students, and families, and consider ways to improve them.

- Maintain a current understanding of changes to school policies and procedures and state and federal laws and regulations. Share this information as it becomes known.
- Keep an eye on how rules and regulations are implemented through the eyes of the students and the teachers. Ensure such regulations are equitable and based on anti-bias and anti-racist practices.

A new assistant principal can thoroughly understand the school's policies and procedures by following these steps. This will allow them to collaborate effectively with staff and administrators to ensure that the school follows all applicable policies and procedures and make recommendations for necessary improvements.

Section #4: Make student relationships a priority: As an assistant principal in an urban school, establishing positive relationships with students can be challenging, but it is essential for fostering a supportive and secure school environment. Here are some valuable strategies for fostering positive relationships with students:

- Learn as many students' names as possible and use them when you encounter them in the hallways or classroom. This small action can significantly impact how students perceive you and whether they feel valued as individuals.
- Attend school events, including sporting events, plays, and other activities. This will demonstrate to students that you value their interests and extracurricular activities and that you see them as a whole person.
- Ask students about their day, interests, and what they learn in class. Demonstrate a sincere interest in what they say, and pay close attention to their responses.

- Walk the halls during class changes, greet students at the door in the morning, and be present during lunch periods. Visibility and accessibility can facilitate the development of positive relationships and a sense of trust among students.
- Recognize and acknowledge students who demonstrate positive behavior or academic success. This can be accomplished through verbal praise or other forms of recognition, such as awards or certificates.
- Demonstrate that you are there for students when they require assistance. This may entail providing academic support, assisting them with navigating personal issues or connecting them with school-based resources and support services.
- Encourage and model positive behavior and attitudes toward learning and relationships to promote a positive school climate. Encourage students to demonstrate mutual respect and celebrate diversity and students throughout the school year.
- Have authentic conversations with students about rules, expectations, and their sense of belonging in the school. Include their perspectives when implementing new rules and expectations.
- Part of the relationship-building efforts includes recognizing and acknowledging students' efforts, whether disciplinary or scholarly, is crucial.
- Create and support student-led government and proactively establish and support student government to give students a say in their daily scholarly activities. It will help students understand their responsibilities as school citizens and the impact of their decisions and actions.

By implementing these strategies, an assistant principal can cultivate positive relationships with students, thereby creating a safe, supportive, and engaging learning environment for all students.

Section #5: Collaborate with teachers and staff: Effective collaboration with teachers and staff is crucial for the success of an urban school assistant principal.

The following are some practical methods for a new assistant principal to collaborate with teachers and staff:

- Establish trust through openness, adherence to commitments, and fulfillment of promises.
- Regularly communicate with teachers and staff via staff meetings, email, and one-on-one conversations. Communicate clearly and concisely, and actively listen to their concerns.
- Provide teachers and staff with the necessary support to ensure their success, whether through professional development opportunities, resources, or access to technology.
- Provide teachers and staff with opportunities to collaborate on curriculum development, lesson planning, and instructional strategies to encourage collaboration. Attending grade-level collaborative meetings, for instance, can help get to know the teachers, observe how they work as a team, and provide support if need be. Whenever possible offer assistance in planning special events or field trips.

- Recognize and celebrate the achievements of teachers and employees, whether through public recognition or incentives.
- Maintaining an open-door policy and being receptive to the needs of teachers and staff will make you approachable and accessible. Project an “I am here to support your efforts” mentality.
- Include educators and personnel in decision-making. Involve teachers and staff by soliciting their input and feedback on school-related issues.

By taking these steps, a new assistant principal in an urban school can effectively collaborate with teachers and staff. This will allow the assistant principal to work more effectively with teachers and staff to enhance instruction, student achievement, and overall success.

Section #6: Address discipline issues proactively: The assistant principal of an urban school must proactively address discipline issues. Here are some practical ways a new assistant principal can proactively address disciplinary issues:

- Establish a positive school culture emphasizing respect, responsibility, and cooperation. Please encourage students to accept responsibility for their actions and contribute to the school community. Model professional interactions with teachers and staff to demonstrate a collegial atmosphere regardless of the circumstances. Students are always watching. When students are not present but other adults are watching, always maintain a professional posture, particularly during times of disagreement.

- Implement restorative practices to address behavior issues constructively and collaboratively, implement restorative practices such as circles, peer mediation, and community service.
- Utilize data for decision-making. Collect and analyze discipline data to identify patterns and develop interventions targeting specific behavior problems.
- Provide teachers and staff opportunities to enhance classroom management, conflict resolution, and restorative practices skills through professional learning experiences.
- Establish clear expectations for conduct and consequences consistently enforced across the institution. Communicate these expectations to students, faculty, and families periodically.
- Involve families in the discipline process by communicating regularly and addressing behavior issues collaboratively.
- Use positive reinforcement, such as praise and rewards, to acknowledge and celebrate positive behavior and to encourage students to continue making good decisions.
- Include student voices in discipline issues and recognize that one size does not fit all. When a rule or a process does not support students' well-being, reconvene the student's village to determine the best support and practice customized to their needs.

By taking these steps, a new assistant principal in an urban school can proactively address discipline issues. This will not only contribute to developing a positive school

culture, but it will also promote student achievement by fostering a safe and encouraging learning environment.

Section #7: Engage with families and community members: Assistant principals in urban schools must interact with family members and community members. The following are some practical ways for a new assistant principal to interact with family and community members:

- Attend community events and activities outside of school hours to show support for students and families.
- Establish channels of communication with families and community members, such as newsletters, social media, and email, to keep them informed of school news and events whenever possible.
- Conduct outreach efforts to engage families and community members who may be less involved, such as those who need to speak English or have limited access to technology.
- Partner with community organizations To provide families with resources and support, such as after-school programs, tutoring, and health services, partner with community organizations.
- Offer to support teachers by attending complex parent-teacher conferences to discuss student progress, behavior, and improvement areas.
- Establish or support a parent-teacher association (PTA) or comparable organization to provide a forum for families and school personnel to collaborate and address issues affecting the school community.

- Attend community meetings and events to learn more about the community, build relationships, and promote the school.

By taking these steps, a new assistant principal in an urban school can effectively engage with family and community members. In addition to fostering positive relationships, this will foster a supportive and inclusive school community committed to the success of all students.

Section #8: Professional Development: Assistant principals in urban schools must keep abreast of educational developments and best practices. Here are several practical ways for a new assistant principal to remain current:

- Participate in regional and national conferences and workshops centered on educational trends and best practices. These events provide opportunities to learn from industry professionals, network with peers, and discover innovative ideas and strategies.
- Join specialist education-related professional organizations like the National Association of Secondary School Principals or the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. These organizations provide access to research, resources, and opportunities for professional development.
- Read and share academic literature to stay current on best practices and emerging trends, read professional literature such as education journals and research studies.
- Participate in social media to connect with other educators, share resources, and stay abreast of educational trends and best practices. Twitter is a popular platform for educators to discuss and share ideas.

- Participate in professional learning communities (PLCs) to collaborate, share ideas, and discuss best practices with other educators in PLCs. These can be organized at the level of the school or district.
- Seek feedback from teachers, staff, and students to determine what works well and what needs improvement. This can help determine areas where further professional development may be required.
- Attend district-wide professional development opportunities, such as training sessions and workshops, to learn about district-wide initiatives and strategies.
- With Parent-Teacher Association, co-construct professional development to address the needs of the families you serve. There can also be events for students. They may engage more deeply in topics they are learning about in class, such as science and social studies.

By taking these actions, a new assistant principal can stay abreast of educational trends and best practices, which can help improve the quality of education for urban school students. Such direction may also lead to a better understanding of the community's needs and student opportunities to dive deeper into their learning of the world.

Section #9: Communication: the following are some practical examples of how a new assistant principal can demonstrate effective communication skills:

- Engage in active listening to ensure you comprehend what others are saying and demonstrate that you value their input.
- Use clear and concise communication to convey information effectively and avoid confusion.

- Practice empathy to comprehend the viewpoints of others and to demonstrate concern for their concerns.
- Ensure timely communication, mainly when dealing with urgent or delicate matters.
- Pay attention to nonverbal communication, such as body language and tone of voice, as it can influence how your message is received.
- Emails, letters, and other forms of written communication should feature clear and professional writing.
- Part of the listening process is journaling. Keeping notes on your own behaviors, feelings, and decisions can be a way to reflect on the journey of becoming a transformational leader.

In an urban school setting, a new assistant principal with practical communication skills can build positive relationships, resolve conflicts, provide feedback, share information, and effectively lead change.

Section #10: Crisis Management: As an urban school's assistant principal, you may be confronted with situations requiring immediate attention and swift action. Here are some practical methods for a new assistant principal to handle a crisis:

- Identify the crisis management team, or the chain of commands and whom you need to notify, report to, and troubleshoot with. Additionally, what happens if they are absent, who are the designees?

- Maintaining composure and calm during a crisis is essential to avoid making decisions based on emotions. Take a deep breath and try to maintain concentration.
- Assess the situation to determine the severity of the crisis and the necessary resources to address it. Collect as much information as possible and, if necessary, consult with relevant parties like school administrators and law enforcement.
- Effectively inform staff, students, and families about the situation, the actions being taken, and what they can do to remain safe.
- Implement emergency protocols if there are crises that threatens safety. Emergency protocols must be implemented to ensure everyone's safety. These protocols may include procedures for lockdowns, evacuations, and other safety measures.
- Crises can be traumatic, and the individuals involved may require support. As needed, provide counseling services, access to mental health resources, and other support services to students, faculty, and families.
- After the crisis has subsided, follow up with the affected parties to offer any necessary support or assistance. Evaluate the crisis response to identify areas for enhancement.
- Utilize the crisis as a learning and improvement opportunity for emergency protocols and crisis management procedures. This can help to prepare for potential future crises.

In conclusion, as an assistant principal in an urban school, handling a crisis requires a calm and composed demeanor, effective communication, the implementation of emergency protocols, support for those involved, and follow-up and learning from the experience.

Be a Culturally Responsive Leader

A responsible assistant principal plays a vital role in developing a culturally responsive school community by promoting diversity, inclusion, and respect. Here are some implementation-ready strategies:

- **Promote cultural competence:** The assistant principal can assist teachers and staff in developing cultural competence by providing opportunities for professional development, encouraging collaboration with families and community members from diverse backgrounds, and creating a safe space for dialogue and discussion about culture.
- **Create a welcoming environment:** Highlight inclusivity by displaying cultural artifacts and artwork, hosting cultural events and celebrations, and offering resources and support to students and families from diverse backgrounds throughout the year.
- **Incorporate diverse perspectives:** Celebrate diversity and equity within the curriculum and encourage teachers to use culturally relevant teaching strategies responsive to students' cultural backgrounds and experiences.
- **Establish partnerships with community organizations:** Collaborate with community organizations to provide resources and support for students and

families from diverse backgrounds and promote cultural understanding and awareness.

- **Engage families and community members:** Involve families and community members from diverse backgrounds in decision-making processes and school activities, and solicit their input and feedback to ensure their perspectives are valued and incorporated.
- **Address cultural conflicts:** Address cultural conflicts in a timely and respectful manner, and provide mediation and conflict resolution opportunities that are culturally sensitive and respectful of diverse perspectives.

Building a culturally responsive community requires inclusiveness, respect, and understanding diverse cultures. A responsible assistant principal can facilitate this by providing teachers, staff, students, families, and the community with leadership, support, and resources that incorporate culturally.

Additional Resources (<https://www.doe.mass.edu>):

1. Guidelines for the Preparation of Administrative Leaders:

- a. To this end, the Department has developed the following resources to support novice principals and their mentors. These resources reinforce the recently updated and fulfill the annual requirements in the Standards for Induction Programs for Administrators ([603 CMR 7.13](https://www.doe.mass.edu)) (<https://www.doe.mass.edu>).

2. Principal Induction and Mentoring Handbook:

- a. This handbook supports novice principals and their mentors to well serve all students with diverse educational needs. Specifically, each learning module in this Handbook is designed to disrupt historical patterns of racial inequity by equipping districts and leaders with the tools, resources, and supports to (<https://www.doe.mass.edu>):
 - i. Continually provide educators with the knowledge, strategies, and actions designed to recognize and foster racial equity in instructional practices and in one's own leadership practices, through the practice and acquisition of the anti-racist leadership competencies (<https://www.doe.mass.edu>)
 - ii. Effectively manage, support, and retain educator talent within their buildings, including recruiting, retaining, and supporting educators of color (<https://www.doe.mass.edu>)
 - iii. Focus on culturally responsive teaching, leading, and curricula that are high quality and evidence-based (<https://www.doe.mass.edu>)
- b. The Principal Induction and Mentoring Handbook, which covers two years of mentoring supports, and the accompanying mentor supplement are now available (<https://www.doe.mass.edu>):
 - i. Mentor Supplement (<https://www.doe.mass.edu>):

This mentor supplement is designed to provide guidance, support, and reflective opportunities for mentors as they guide their

mentees through the learning modules in the Principal Induction and Mentoring Handbook. (Updated August 2022)

ii. Induction and Mentoring Program Required Components

<https://www.doe.mass.edu>:

Induction and Mentoring Program Required Components	Beginning Teacher (new to the profession)	Incoming Teacher (new to the district/role)	Beginning Administrator (new to the profession)	Incoming Administrator (new to the district/role)
Orientation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Assigned Mentor	✓	Recommended	✓	Recommended
50 Hours of mentoring beyond induction year	✓	Possibly ¹ .	Recommended	Recommended
Support team, including at a minimum a mentor and qualified evaluator	✓	Recommended	✓	Recommended
Release time for mentor and mentee	✓	Recommended	✓	Recommended
Time and resources to learn hiring, supervision and evaluation methods included in the Professional Standards for Administrators	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	✓	Recommended
Additional induction supports in years 2 and 3	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended

District Administrators’ Induction and Support Cohort Program:

New assistant principal should have a support group cohort to meet during the orientation days at the beginning of the year, and then bi-weekly throughout the academic year for the first year, and quarterly in the second year. The support team should advise and assist the new assistant principals in achieving their professional goals. The new assistant principals will also benefit by having a coach or consultant outside of their supervisor or assigned mentor for additional teaching and training pertaining to the assistant principalship. Below is a framework for what these sessions could look like:

Urban Pre-K-8 School

New Assistant Principal's Support Cohort Syllabus - Year I

2023 – 2024

Course Requirements and Expectations:

First-year administrators in the district are expected to actively participate in all class discussions and activities. This will be a support cohort model. We strongly encourage you not to use your personal smartphone, tablet, iPad, and/or laptop during each session, as we are striving to promote a positive, enriching, engaging, and collaborative cohort.

Because the Commonwealth of Massachusetts mandates this program, we have spoken to your building administrators about the course calendar and your commitments. With that being said, attendance for each session is mandatory. *You are allowed one unexcused absence during the course; however, any additional absence(s) will require you to submit a 1-2 page reflection paper about the topic that was missed.* Please email in advance if you have a personal conflict. No outside resources or materials are necessary for this course. Please bring your New Administrator's Course Folder with you to each session. This folder will store all of your appendices/materials that we have prepared for this course.

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August (2023) - Orientation Day I

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

8:30 AM – 3:30 PM

“Beginning to bloom in District - Part I”

Session Agenda:

1. Do Now: Who are you? Where do you come from? Why did you become an administrator (who was your inspiration/influence)? What are you excited about? What are you most anxious about right now in this moment?
2. Getting to know you as an individual
3. Who’s who in Urban Pre-K-8 School
4. Urban Pre-K-8 School’s mission statement, district improvement plan goals, and school-specific plan goals
5. Overview of district and school-specific calendars/major community events and important dates
6. Tips, tricks, hints, questions, and answers for preparing for the academic year
7. Ethics Training
8. Surveying student’s educational history (Individualized Education Plan, 504 Accommodations, Reading and Math Intervention Programs, Social/Emotional Support Programs, English as a Second Language Accommodations, medical history/allergies, office cumulative student files, Aspen icons (more so for secondary educators), and preparations for first team/department meetings with Special Educator Liaisons

9. Baseline/Fall diagnostic assessments
 - a. Pacing guides
 - b. Goals and action steps
 - c. Introduction to Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)

* * * * *

August (2023) - Orientation Day II

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

8:30 AM – 3:30 PM

“Beginning to bloom in District - Part II”

Session Agenda:

1. Introduction to the School District Administrators, Building Administrators, and Mentors
2. Introduction to Payroll and Benefits with Financial Supervisor
3. Lunch with your Mentor
4. Identification Badge Photos
5. Introduction to Urban Pre-K-8 E-Mail and Aspen Portal
6. Pass out and provide an overview of the Unit B Administrator’s Contract
7. Expectations for the job as an administrator: attendance, absences (personal, professional, and sick leave), crisis/emergency plans, evaluation procedures, SMARTIE goals, assembly procedures, mailbox, paychecks/pay periods/payment statements, technology reservations and resources, submitting work orders through maintenance/custodial/facilities, supply purchasing, accepting gifts, and

professional development

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September (2023) Bi-Weekly Session I

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Who are they and who are you?”

Session Agenda:

1. Do Now: Think about your first two-weeks? What has been one great success, and what information have you already learned about your students?
2. Welcome letter to students and families
3. Family/Parent survey or letter to teacher
4. Surveying student’s educational history (Individualized Education Plan, 504 Accommodations, Reading and Math Intervention Programs, Social/Emotional Support Programs, English as a Second Language Accommodations, medical history/allergies, office cumulative student files, Aspen icons (more so for secondary educators), and preparations for first team/department meetings with Special Educator Liaisons
5. Baseline/Fall diagnostic assessments
6. Informal conversations/observations with parents, counselors, and students
7. Back to school night and parent-teacher conferences important dates, and tricks and hints

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September (2023) Bi-Weekly Session II

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Learning to lead”

Session Agenda:

- 1. Overview/mission of the Urban Pre-K-8 School
- 2. Discussion(s) and overview of goal setting and TeachPoint
- 3. Collaborative conversations about “work-ons” and “keep-ons”

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October (2023) Bi-Weekly Session I

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“BE YOU and fill your ‘bags’ with support”

Session Agenda:

- 1. Introduction of Union Representatives
- 2. Union President presentation of the Unit B Contract (first half of session)
- 3. Debriefing, processing, and questions
- 4. Discussion and tips about professional development point/in-service credits, evaluations, goal setting, licensure, and suggestions for the proper protocols

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October (2023) Bi-Weekly Session II

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Dealing with the difficulties”

Session Agenda:

1. Do Now: on a piece of paper, write about three situations in which you have, or are experiencing a personal and/or professional struggle in regard to your role as an instructional leader.
2. Discussion about today’s Do Now
3. What is co-teaching? What does this practice look like in a classroom?
Supporting co-teaching classrooms
4. Student Study Teams and what that process looks like
5. Policies and procedures for state mandated reporting and confidentiality
6. Learning office protocols for discipline referrals, sending a student to the nurse, and counseling groups and individual sessions

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November (2023) Bi-Weekly Session I

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Diagnosing and detecting dynamite differentiation”

Session Agenda:

1. Conversation about Universal Design for Learning and how every learner should always experience a form of individual success each day
2. What does differentiation look like when evaluating and/or coaching?

3. Curriculum and Instruction: Backwards Designs, pacing guides for grade-levels and departments, State Standards, and SEI strategies

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November (2023) Bi-Weekly Session II

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Leading with Technology”

Session Agenda:

1. This session will focus on the technology applications for administrators in the Urban Pre-K-8 School along with methods and strategies of collaboration: students, families, colleagues, teams/grade levels, departments, and other district buildings
2. Getting to know your academic departments/curriculum administrators/pacing guides
3. Preparing for your Formative Evaluation Meeting Conversation

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December (2023) Session

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Urban Pre-K-8 School’s Crisis Response Protocol”

Session Agenda:

1. This session is still being developed and designed, but the topic will focus on the Urban Pre-K-8 School’s A. L. I. C. E. Crisis Response Protocol

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January (2024) Bi-Weekly Session I

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Celebrating and discussing differences and cultures professionally and personally – Class One”

Session Agenda:

1. “I am From” Poem or “I am” Poem
2. Sharing of poems
3. Activities that focus on building a leadership team and celebrating differences
4. Discussions about practical applications about cultural proficiency seen in the academic classroom/unstructured time
5. Questions and answer period for new leaders to reflect/story sharing

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January (2024) Bi-Weekly Session II

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Celebrating and discussing differences and cultures professionally and personally – Class Two”

Session Agenda:

1. Do Now: How have you exemplified aspects of cultural proficiency in your position? What issues/topics of diversity are you comfortable discussing with your leadership team and/or staff? Why? What issues/topics of diversity are you uncomfortable discussing with your leadership team and/or staff? Why?
2. Introduce the Urban Pre-K-8 School’s Equity and Diversity Committee and the committee’s mission/philosophy
3. Equity and Diversity Committee rotation activity revolved around appropriate language
4. Questions and answer period for new leaders to reflect/story sharing
5. Available resources/contacts

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February (2024) Bi-Weekly Session I

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Climbing Up in the Urban Pre-K-8 School”

Session Agenda:

1. Wrap-up dialogue about Equity and Diversity Committee work and next steps
2. Professional Development Point(s), In-Service Credit(s), and Graduate Credit(s) conversations and discussion
3. Potentially an opportunity to have a dialogue with Central Office Administrators

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February (2024) Bi-Weekly Session II

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Expectations, Evidence, and Evaluation”

This session will focus primarily on the collection of evidence and the formal evaluative meeting with your primary evaluator.

Session Agenda:

1. Do Now: based on the professional and district goals, what materials or resources will you include into your professional portfolio for your evaluation?
2. Discussion about what good evidence looks like through a carousel activity
3. Possible Evaluation Evidence Example
4. Personal expectations and Unit B expectations for your evaluative process/evaluation meeting
5. Dos and Don'ts for your summative sit-down appointment with your primary evaluator

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March (2024) Bi-Weekly Session I

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Urban Pre-K-8 School’s Response to Bullying”

Session Agenda:

1. This session will focus on Urban Pre-K-8 School’s Response to Bullying

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March (2024) Bi-Weekly Session II

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

“Building coping strategies for continued professional growth and collaboration”

Session Agenda:

- 1. Year-two goal setting discussion(s)
- 2. Revising curriculum map/pacing guide for next year
- 3. Collaborative time to start building the final showcase portfolio

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April (2024) Bi-Weekly Session I

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 6:45 PM

“Showcasing your individuality to your cohort and mentor – Part I”

Session Agenda:

- 1. Final Presentations & Discussions (Part I of II)
- 2. Mentors and District Leaders are invited to this session

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April (2024) Bi-Weekly Session II

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 6:45 PM

“Showcasing your individuality to your cohort and mentor – Part II”

Session Agenda:

1. Final Presentations & Discussions (Part II of II)
2. Final thoughts and next steps (see you in Year Two!)
3. Mentors and District Leaders are invited to this session

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Urban Pre-K-8 School

New Assistant Principal's Support Cohort Syllabus - Year II

2023 – 2024

Course Requirements and Expectations:

Second-year administrators in the induction program are expected to actively participate in all class discussions and activities. We strongly encourage you not to use your personal smartphone, tablet, iPad, and/or laptop during each session, as we are striving to promote a positive, enriching, engaging, and collaborative cohort.

Because the Commonwealth of Massachusetts mandates this program, we have spoken to your building administrators about the course calendar and your commitments. With that being said, attendance for each session is mandatory. *You are allowed one unexcused absence during the course; however, any additional absence(s) will require you to submit a 1-2 page reflection paper about the topic that was missed.* Please email in advance if you have a personal conflict.

No outside resources or materials are necessary for the New Assistant Principal's Support Cohort - Year II. Please bring your Year Two New Administrator's Course Folder with you to each session. This folder will store all of your appendices/materials

that we have prepared for this course. In addition to these four scheduled meetings, you and your administrator's mentor will also be responsible for showing proof of 50 hours of advanced mentoring. These hours need to be completed by June 2023 (end of this academic school year).

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September (2023) Quarterly Session I

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

Session Agenda:

1. Do Now: Who are you? Where do you come from? Why did you become an instructional leader (who was your inspiration/influence)? What are you excited about during year two? What are you most anxious about right now in this moment?
2. Getting to know you as an individual
3. Expectations Activity: Who are you? Who is your mentor?
4. Year Two Mentoring Goals
5. Establishing mentor meeting dates, times, and locations
6. Documenting your time

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November (2023) Quarterly Session II

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

Session Agenda:

1. Evaluation questions and concerns
2. Check-in on year two mentoring goals
3. Check-in on advanced mentoring hours (mentor meetings)
4. Mentoring Hot Topic Discussions: Successes, Failures, and Challenges

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February (2024) Quarterly Session III

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

Session Agenda:

1. Evaluation questions and concerns
2. Check-in on year two mentoring goals
3. Check-in on advanced mentoring hours (mentor meetings)
4. Mentoring Hot Topic Discussions: Successes, Failures, and Challenges

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May (2024) Quarterly Session IV

Urban Pre-K-8 School Library

3:45 PM – 5:45 PM

Session Agenda:

1. Year two paper and documentation preparation conversation
2. Mentor and Mentee defining their relationship activity
3. Proving your advanced mentoring hours
4. Next steps and wrap-up

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