Appendix B.
Midwestern State Report

Can School Leaders Lead?
A Study by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and the American Institutes for Research®

I. Introduction

In the midwestern state visited, 12 public school principals were interviewed to determine: (a) how they characterized effective school leadership, (b) the degree to which they felt they were able to exercise effective school leadership as they perceived it, (c) the barriers to leadership they perceived along with sources of those barriers, and (d) the skills they believed today's principals need to be effective leaders. All of the principals were from elementary schools within two urban districts (MW-District 1 and MW-District 2), and six district-operated public school principals from each of these districts were interviewed.

Principals in both districts identified many common challenges to school leadership, including staffing issues, autonomy over the instructional program, and budget constraints.

Staffing, budgets, and union contracts were common themes that highlighted the impediments to principals' ability to lead. Many of the barriers they identified that related to the staffing issues of hiring, transferring, and discharging staff were rooted in the union contracts and district personnel polices and practices, which proved to be very challenging for the public school principals.

While the local context of each district has unique facets, both districts were managed under a centralized "managed-instruction" theory of action, in which decisions about curriculum and programs were centrally determined at the district level and handed down to those in the schools to implement. Therefore, autonomy over instructional programs to meet the needs of students was identified as a barrier to leadership for most of the principals in MW-District 1 and some of the principals in MW-District 2. It is likely that the differences between the two districts can be attributed to slight variations in the local district's educational philosophy and the differences in local contexts.

According to the principals, the budget constraints were caused by a number of factors. First, funding of the district was limited. Second, competition with charter schools and their funding mechanisms within both districts draw students and money away from the district-operated public schools. This made it difficult for the district-operated school principals to plan and make positive changes in subsequent years of schooling because the budget for the upcoming year could not be counted upon. Third, schools that were designated "needs improvement" because they did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) were given additional funds for tutoring and extended services; however, once the schools successfully used these funds and made AYP, the funding disappeared. The handful of principals who experienced this shift felt frustrated that effective activities that improved student achievement were taken away once the students met a minimum threshold.

II. Characteristics Of Principals Interviewed

Twelve district-operated public school principals from two urban districts were interviewed. All principals were leaders of elementary schools ranging from K–3 to K–8 schools. Seventy-five percent of the principals interviewed were female and 25% were male. Fifty-eight percent of all principals were African American and the remaining 42% were White/Caucasian. Eighty-three percent of the principals were 45 years or older and 60% were over the age of 54 (Table 1). On average, the principals interviewed had 10.8 years of experience as principals and of those years, the average amount of time served at their current district was 10.2 years. The range in years of experience was from 1 year[1] to 25.5 years as a principal (Table 2). The principals, in most cases, worked their way up to their position from within the district and most have been in the same school throughout their tenure as a principal. On average, the principals had 13.7 years of teaching experience and approximately 13.1 years of that experience was within the same district in which they were currently principals. Ninety-two percent of the principals held master's degrees, 17% held specialist degrees, and 8% held a doctorate (Table 3).

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[1] The study required that all principals have at least 3 years of experience; however, the district supplied us with one principal who had 1 year of experience as a principal and 7 years of experience as a school and district administrator within the district. For this reason, we included this principal in our study.

Table 1 **Average Age of Experience of Principals Interviewed**

Age Range	% of Principals
55–64	58.33%
45–54	25.00%
35–44	16.67%

Table 2 **Average Years of Experience of Principals Interviewed as Administrators and Teachers**

Years of Experience	As Principal	As Administrator (not Principal)	As Teacher
Total	10.8	4.3	13.7
District	10.2	.8	12.2
School	6.7	4.0	1.1

Table 3 **Educational Attainment of Principals Interviewed**

Educational Attainment	% of Principals
Master's Degree	92%
Specialist Certification	17%
Doctorate (PhD/EdD)	8%

In both districts, principals saw themselves as leaders and described their jobs as demanding and rewarding. There was a general sense that even without federal, state, and local accountability requirements, their primary job would be to raise student ability and achievement levels. Additionally, principals took their responsibility as instructional leaders of their schools seriously and believed that this was a top priority, though in MW-District 1, safety was brought up as an equal priority. One principal described what many of the principals expressed as being their main job: "remove all barriers" for the teachers and students within their school, despite some of the constraints that they, as the school leader, had to face.

Principals in both districts felt the weight of the external expectations for their students. In both districts, principals discussed the state and federal expectations, and in MW-District 1 the conversation never seemed to move beyond AYP. In MW-District 2, principals prioritized state and federal accountability requirements, but also discussed their mission statements and visions in conjunction with having a staff of highly qualified teachers.

III. School Characteristics

The principals of the 12 district-operated public schools in the midwestern state served 4,942 students in grades K–8. All of the schools served grades 1–5, and all but one of the schools served students in grades K–6. Half of the schools (six) served students through Grade 7, and five schools served students through Grade 8.

School Demographics

On average there were 53 students per grade and 100% of those students were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch (Table 4). Fifteen percent of these students were in special education and 3% were considered limited English proficient.

Table 4 **Urban Public (Non-Charter) Schools' Demographics**

	Enrollment*	# Students per grade	% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch	% Special Education	% Limited English Proficient	Per-Pupil Expenditure
Average	412	53	100%	15%	3%	$ 6,634
Total	4942					

* The enrollment calculations are based on all students within the school, therefore the school demographic information will encompass some elementary and middle school grades.

There were approximately 14 students per teacher (Table 5). Teachers possessed an average of 16.8 years of experience and a median of 16 years of experience among the schools. The average number of years of experience ranged from a low of 15 years to a high of 20 years, as reported by the public school principals. On average, there were 1.4 novice teachers per school. The novice teachers were concentrated in schools rated by the state as average or low performing[2] and were primarily in one of the two urban districts (MW-District 1). The percentage of teacher turnover was higher in the schools that were lower performing than in the other schools. There was little to no teacher turnover in the highest performing schools.

Table 5 **Urban Public (Non-Charter) Schools' Teacher Information**

	# of Students per Teacher	# of Teachers per Grade	Teacher- Years of Experience	# of Novice Teachers	# of Teacher Dismissals (2004–2005)	% of Teacher Turnover
Average	13.6	3.9	16.8	1.4	2.0	11.3%

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[2] The actual name for the state ratings has not been used to maintain state anonymity.

School Status

For the purposes of this report schools have been categorized into one of three categories: high performing, average performing, and low performing. The midwest state's school rating systems along with those of the southeastern state and the western state were arranged into these three categories so that comparisons across states based on school status can be made. The actual state designations are not included in this report to maintain the states' anonymity.

Of the 12 district-operated public school principals interviewed, the principals were the leaders of two schools that were high performing, eight that were average performing, and two that were low performing (Table 6).

Table 6 School Designations

School Status Category	Report Card Designation
High Performing	2
Average Performing	8
Low Performing	2

IV. Constraints on Leadership

When principals expressed leadership constraints, they felt their source was the district office and the midwestern state's department of education guidelines. According to MW-District 2 principals, if a school was performing at high levels, the district granted that school's principal a certain level of flexibility to make decisions that were important to raising student achievement. Principals of schools that were lower performing felt they had less flexibility and autonomy. Staffing was a challenge in both districts. Principals specifically pointed to the union contract and district policies that encouraged more senior teachers to transfer to higher achieving schools, leaving lower-performing schools with less-experienced teachers and lower-quality instruction. Additionally, the district practices sometimes limited a principal's ability to screen paper applications and interview prospective staff.

When asked to what degree their actions to raise student achievement were constrained by outside forces, approximately 67% of principals interviewed indicated that their actions were "somewhat constrained" (Table 7). The same percentage (66.7%) of principals stated that they had "somewhat of an ability" to exercise effective leadership. The number of years a principal

had worked in the district as a teacher or administrator did not make much of a difference as to the level of constraint the principals felt. However, school status did make a difference with 50% of principals from high-performing schools, 75% from average-performing schools, and 100% of principals from low-performing schools feeling somewhat constrained. The sample size for the high- and low-performing schools is very low, therefore it is in no way conclusive. However, principals in high- and low-performing schools discussed feeling constrained and attributed at least part of this constraint to their school's status.

Table 7 How Much Principals Feel Their Actions to Raise Student Achievement are Constrained by Outside Forces

Midwestern State (n = 12)	Not at all Constrained	Not Very Constrained	Somewhat Constrained	Very Constrained
All public school principals interviewed (n = 12)	17.0%	8.0%	66.7%	0.0%
YEARS IN DISTRICT				
Principals who have been **in the district for less than 20 years** (n = 4)	25.0%	0%	75.0%	0.0%
Principals who have been **in the district for 20 or more years** (n = 8)	12.5%	12.5%	75.0%	0.0%
SCHOOL STATUS				
Principals of schools that are **high performing** (n = 2)	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Principals of schools that are **average performing** (n = 8)	12.5%	12.5%	75.0%	0.0%
Principals of schools that are **low performing** (n = 2)	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

As far as their overall ability to exercise effective school leadership, on average 16.67% had a strong ability and 66.67% had somewhat of an ability to exercise effective school leadership (Table 8). Principals who had more experience in the district (20 or more years) were more likely

to feel they had an overall ability to exercise effective school leadership than those who had been in the district for less than 20 years. School status also influenced a principal's perception of his or her ability to exercise leadership, with high-performing school principals feeling more able than average-performing school principals and average-performing school principals feeling more able that low-performing schools.[3]

Table 8 **How Principals Rated Their Overall Ability to Exercise Effective Leadership**

Midwestern State (n = 12)	Strong Ability	Somewhat of an Ability	Somewhat Unable	Strongly Unable
All public school principals interviewed (n = 12)	16.67%	66.67%	16.67%	0.00%
YEARS IN DISTRICT				
Principals who have been in the district for less than 20 years (n = 4)	12.5%	25.0%	25.0%	37.5%
Principals who have been in the district for 20 or more years (n = 8)*	12.5%	62.5%	25.0%	0.0%
SCHOOL STATUS				
Principals of schools that are **high performing (**n = 2)	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Principals of schools that are **average performing** (n = 8)	12.5%	12.5%	75.0%	0.0%
Principals of schools that are **low performing** (n = 2)	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

The principals identified a few areas that were very important to effective school leadership (Table 9). Staffing issues were very important to all of the principals. These issues included the determining the number and type of faculty and staff in their buildings (97.7%), hiring staff (100.0%), assigning teachers (100.0%), transferring unsuitable teachers (100.0%), and discharging unsuitable teachers (91.7%). Regarding staffing, principals believed they had

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[3] The sample size for the school status breakdown is very small and therefore insufficient to make conclusions about the meaning of these results.

varying levels of actual autonomy over the functions of assigning (within their buildings), hiring, transferring, and dismissing staff. Most principals felt they had at least some influence over assigning teachers (75%). While principals felt they had less autonomy (50% or more indicating "not so much" or "no" autonomy) in the areas of: determining number and type of faculty, hiring, transferring, and discharging faculty.

Table 9 Perceived Need for Versus Actual Autonomy of Principals Interviewed

	Midwestern State—Function	Perceived Importance to Effectiveness as a School Leader				How Much Autonomy the Principal Currently Has (Actual)			
		Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not so Important	Not at all Important	Great Deal of Autonomy	Some Autonomy	Not so Much Autonomy	No Autonomy
1	Number/type of faculty and staff	91.67%	8.33%	0.00%	0.00%	8.33%	25.00%	25.00%	41.67%
2	Allocating resources	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	25.00%	41.67%	25.00%	8.33%
3	Hiring	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	8.33%	33.33%	33.33%	25.00%
4	Teacher pay or bonuses	0.00%	66.67%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	8.33%	91.67%
5	Assigning teachers*	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	8.33%	75.00%	16.67%	0.00%
6	Transferring unsuitable teachers*	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	25.00%	8.33%	41.67%
7	Discharging unsuitable teachers*	91.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	33.33%	25.00%	25.00%
8	Assigning noninstructional duties	33.33%	50.00%	8.33%	8.33%	41.67%	41.67%	8.33%	8.33%
9	Teacher and student schedules*	50.00%	25.00%	16.67%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
10	Controlling school calendar	16.67%	58.33%	25.00%	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	25.00%	66.67%
11	Allocating time for instruction	91.67%	8.33%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%
12	Determining extracurricular activities	25.00%	41.67%	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%	41.67%	8.33%	16.67%
13	Program adoption decisions	41.67%	50.00%	8.33%	0.00%	8.33%	50.00%	41.67%	0.00%
14	Curriculum pacing and sequencing	41.67%	41.67%	8.33%	0.00%	16.67%	16.67%	41.67%	25.00%
15	Methods and materials	41.67%	50.00%	8.33%	0.00%	16.67%	50.00%	25.00%	8.33%
16	Student discipline policies/procedures	91.67%	8.33%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	16.67%	16.67%
17	Controlling student dress	41.67%	33.33%	25.00%	0.00%	41.67%	41.67%	16.67%	0.00%
18	Parental involvement requirements	33.33%	58.33%	8.33%	0.00%	33.33%	25.00%	16.67%	25.00%
19	Time spent on instructional versus operational issues	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	41.67%	16.67%	8.33%
20	Controlling the school facility	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	58.33%	8.33%	0.00%
21	Engaging in private fundraising	16.67%	50.00%	33.33%	0.00%	16.67%	75.00%	8.33%	0.00%

* Not all principals responded to this question.

Other areas that principals identified as being very important to effective school leadership included: allocating time for instruction (91.7%), determining student discipline policies and procedures (91.7%), and determining the time they spent on instructional versus operational functions (75.0%). All of the principals felt they currently had at least some autonomy over allocating time for instruction. As far as student discipline, time spent on instructional and operational functions were concerned, principals seemed to feel they had some autonomy over these areas as well.

V. Principals' Influence Over School Functions

Table 10 takes another look at these data. By comparing the percentage of principals who identified a function as being very or somewhat important to effective school leadership with the percentage of principals who currently have a great deal or some influence over this same functional area, discrepancies become apparent, as well as areas where the current level of influence is at or close to where the principals believe it should be. The areas where there was the biggest difference were primarily (a) staffing issues (determining the number and type of faculty, teacher pay or bonuses, hiring, transferring unsuitable teachers, and discharging unsuitable teachers); (b) controlling the school calendar; and (c) curriculum pacing and sequencing.

Staffing is the area where the divide between autonomy the principals believed they needed to be effective leaders and their actual influence over these functions was the greatest. Principals named union contracts, policies, and rules as well as district policies as the major contributors to their lack of authority over staffing issues.

Two reasons were given for lack of control over the school calendar. First, decisions about the school calendar were made at the district level. Control over the curriculum and instructional programming and the negotiations of the union contract occurred at the district level (teacher time is negotiated within the contract) thus limiting the role of the principal in these functions. The significant issue, however, was in the intense competition between the district-operated schools and the charter schools within both districts. This dynamic of competition limited the
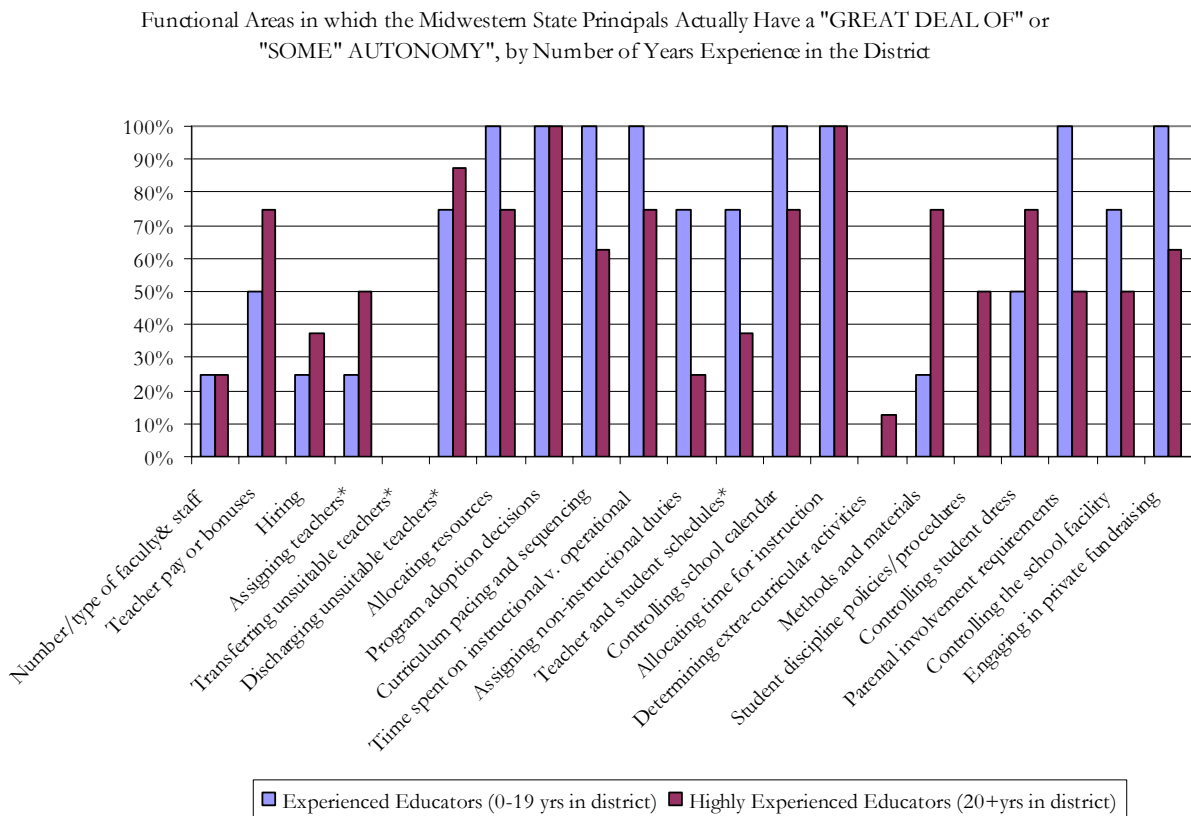
ability of principals to extend their school days, a step they believed was necessary to compete with the longer school days provided by some charter schools. This resulted in some schools losing students (and funds) to charter schools. Without the flexibility to determine changes to their calendar and extend the school day, principals were unable to compete with their charter counterparts. The loss of funds that followed the students who went to charter schools added to their inability to compete with the charter schools.

Table 10 Perceived Need for Effective School Versus Actual Influence of Principals Interviewed

Midwestern—Function	Function is "Very" or "Somewhat" Important to Effective School Leadership	Currently Have a "Great Deal" of "Some" Autonomy	Difference Between Importance of Autonomy Less Actual Autonomy
Number/type of faculty and staff	100.0%	33.3%	66.7%
Teacher pay or bonuses	66.7%	0.0%	66.7%
Controlling school calendar	75.0%	8.3%	66.7%
Hiring	100.0%	41.7%	58.3%
Transferring unsuitable teachers	100.0%	41.7%	58.3%
Curriculum pacing and sequencing	83.3%	33.3%	50.0%
Discharging unsuitable teachers	91.7%	50.0%	41.7%
Program adoption decisions	91.7%	58.3%	33.3%
Student discipline policies/procedures	100.0%	66.7%	33.3%
Parental involvement requirements	91.7%	58.3%	33.3%
Allocating resources	100.0%	66.7%	33.3%
Methods and materials	91.7%	66.7%	25.0%
Time spent on instructional versus operational issues	100.0%	75.0%	25.0%
Assigning teachers	100.0%	83.3%	16.7%
Controlling the school facility	100.0%	91.7%	8.3%
Allocating time for instruction	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Assigning noninstructional duties	83.3%	83.3%	0.0%
Determining extracurricular activities	66.7%	75.0%	-8.3%
Controlling student dress	75.0%	83.3%	-8.3%
Teacher and student schedules	75.0%	100.0%	-25.0%
Engaging in private fundraising	66.7%	91.7%	-25.0%

Curriculum sequencing and pacing constraints were a product of the "managed-instruction" theory of action the district used to manage schools. Both districts are considered "managed-instruction" districts, which are generally characterized as having centralized, district control of and support for curriculum and instructional activities at the school level. District intervention into a school was based on a school's performance (lower performance = more district intervention, and higher performance = less district intervention). Consequently, principals in the higher-performing schools believed that they had more freedom and influence because they were meeting the standards and therefore felt less "control" from the district and an increased independence to make their own decisions (Figure 1).

<u>Figure 1</u> Perceived Autonomy of Principals, by Number of Years of Experience Within the District

Functional Areas in which the Midwestern State Principals Actually Have a "GREAT DEAL OF" or "SOME" AUTONOMY", by Number of Years Experience in the District
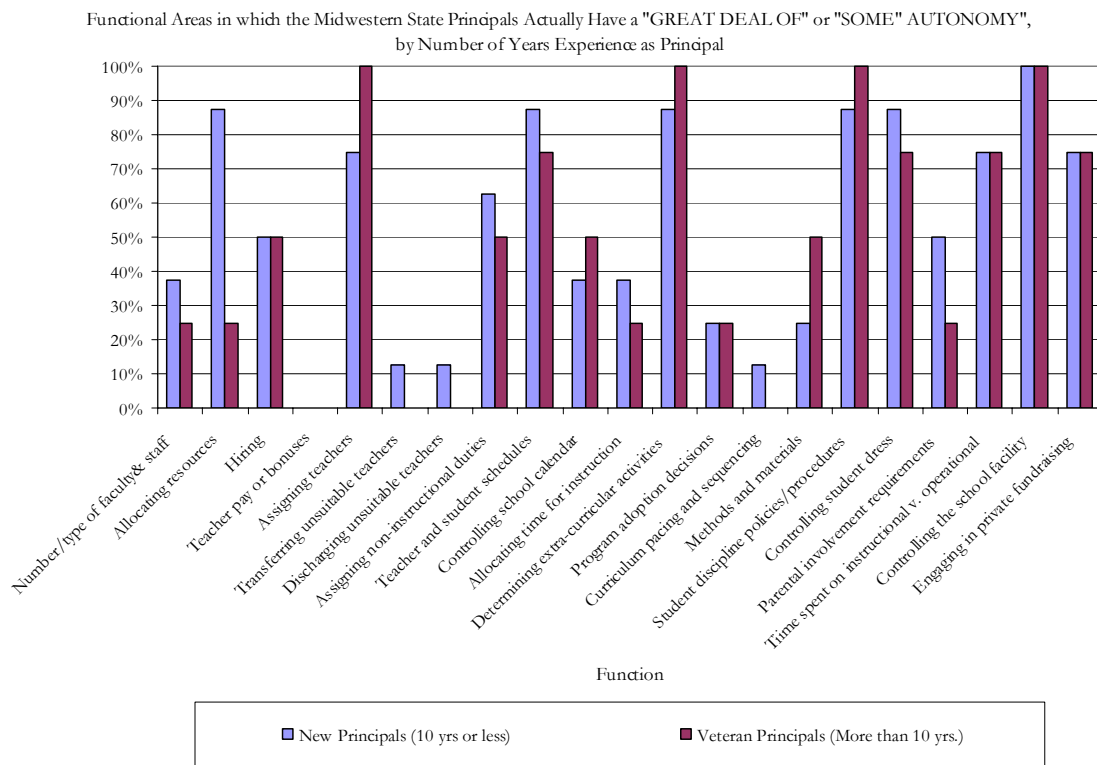

The leadership context of each school is created in part by the characteristics of the principal and the needs of the school. The autonomy data were examined to see if differences in experience and/or school status influenced principals' perceptions of their ability to practice effective school

leadership. Figures 1 and 2 categorize the principals' perception of their perceived influence based on three different categories.

First, the data were categorized by the number of years of experience principals had in their current district in any capacity (teacher, administrator, principal). Principals were categorized as "experienced educators" (1–19 years of experience working in the district) or "highly experienced educators" (20 or more years of experience working in the district) (Figure 1). Of the 12 principals interviewed, 4 were experienced, and 8 were considered highly experienced educators.

Second, principals were categorized into two categories based on the total number of years of experience they had as principals (Figure 2). The principals were sorted into "new principals" who had 10 years or less experience and "veteran principals" who had more than 10 years of experience.

<u>Figure 2</u> Perceived Influence of Principals, by Number of Years of Experience as Principals

Functional Areas in which the Midwestern State Principals Actually Have a "GREAT DEAL OF" or "SOME" AUTONOMY", by Number of Years Experience as Principal

Principals' responses varied. Generally, new and veteran principals indicated they had about the same amount of autonomy in most of the functional areas. Less-experienced principals felt they had more autonomy over the allocation of resources, while veteran principals felt they had slightly more autonomy over the assignment of teachers and staff and determining methods and materials. The highly experienced educators felt they had more influence over decisions about methods and materials and student discipline than their less-experienced counterparts. However, the less-experienced educators felt they had more control over teacher schedules and assigning noninstructional duties. On the other hand, those with more years of experience as principals felt they had more control over the methods and materials (like the highly experienced educators), as well as assigning teachers. The newer principals (less than 10 years of experience) felt they had more control over parental involvement requirements and allocating resources. The reasons for this difference are not certain.

In interviews, more-experienced principals said that some of the barriers to controlling these functions could be "overcome" because they knew how to "work the system" or they knew people in the "right places" within the district, giving them an informal sense of autonomy over these issues. There is a sense that they had a type of de facto autonomy because of their status in the school, district, and community.

VII. The Effect of School Status on Perceived Influence of Principals
In Figure 3, the principals' responses were divided into three categories based on the status of the schools they were leading. For the purposes of this report, schools have been grouped into three performance categories based on the state performance designation: high performing, average performing, and low performing. The number of schools in each category makes generalization difficult; however, some interesting differences emerge among the schools.

Figure 3 Perceived Influence of Principals, by School Status

Functional Areas in which the Midwestern State Principals Actually Have a "GREAT DEAL OF" or "SOME" AUTONOMY", by School Status
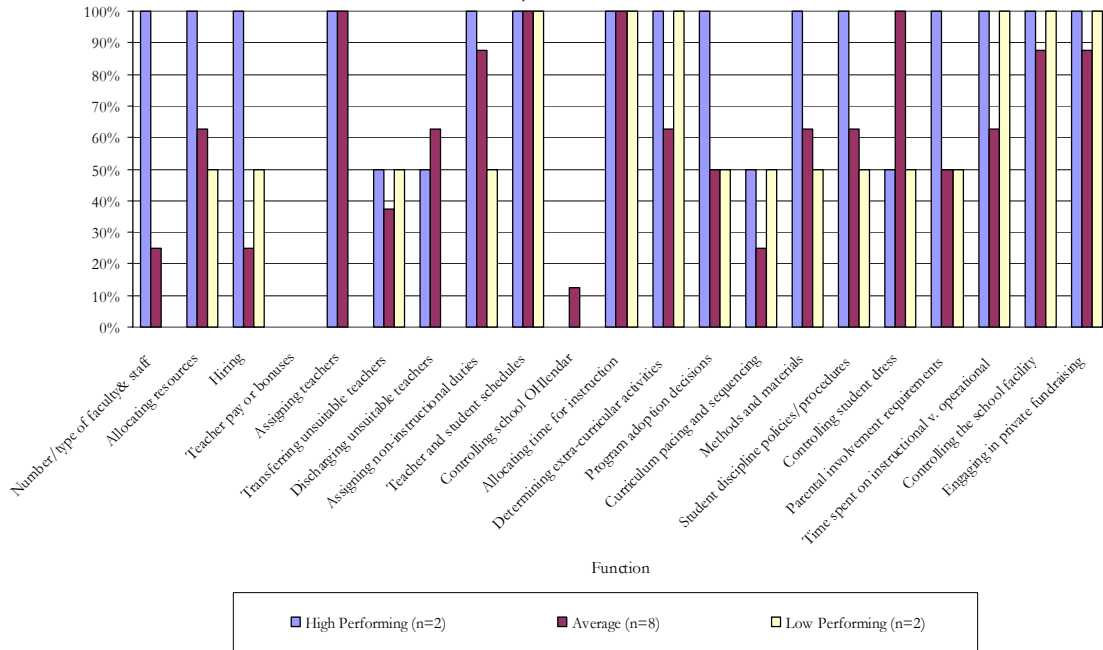
Higher-performing school principals felt they had more influence than their counterparts from lower-performing schools in the areas of determining the number and type of faculty and staff, allocating resources, hiring and assigning teachers, overseeing various instructional areas (methods and materials, curriculum pacing and sequencing, program adoption), and setting parental involvement levels. In the area of controlling student dress, the principals of average-performing schools felt they had more influence than those of high- or low-performing schools. In a few areas the principals of the high- and low-performing schools actually felt they had more autonomy than the average-performing schools, including: determining extracurricular activities and time spent on instructional versus operational issues. Otherwise, the average-performing schools tended to fall between the high- and low-performing schools as far as their principals' perceived level of influence over the functional areas.

VIII. Barriers to Effective School Leadership

Each principals was asked about his or her role in a number of different functional areas ranging from staffing, to operations, to instructional leadership; whether that role was limited; and if each perceived this limitation to be a serious barrier to effective school leadership. Table 11 lists the

functional areas in which principals indicated they had a limited role. The top ten functional areas include:

1. Determining teacher pay or bonuses (100.0%)
2. Hiring teacher and support staff (91.7%)
3. Determining the number and type of faculty positions (83.3%)
4. Making program adoption decisions (83.3%)
5. Making curriculum pacing and sequencing decisions about curriculum (83.3%)
6. Transferring unsuitable teachers and staff (66.7%)
7. Controlling key features of the school calendar (66.7%)
8. Allocating resources for materials (58.3%)
9. Discharging unsuitable teachers (58.3%)
10. Determining methods and materials (58.3%)

Many of the areas in which principals played a limited role were related to staffing and curriculum/methods issues. In the interviews, hiring was identified as the most serious barrier that principals faced. Principals believed the districts' policies, combined with the union contracts, were major contributors to hindering their efforts with regard to staff hiring, firing, and transferring. Again, their limited role with regard to curriculum and methods stemmed from the theory of action their districts used. Both MW-District 1 and MW-District 2 were considered "managed-instruction" districts, which rely heavily on controlling the inputs to manage expected outcomes. Though how this theory of action manifested itself varied, at their core the districts were similar. Variation in the treatment of schools depending on the schools' performance status contributed to perceived levels of autonomy in both districts. Principals in the above-average and some higher-achieving average schools suggested that the better their schools performed, the less district control they felt.

Other barriers that principals listed included: budget cuts and limited resources, union contracts, staff motivation, buy-in to school practices, principal preparation, student home life, and charter school competition. Interestingly, when principals were asked which areas they considered to be serious barriers, the principals identified staffing issues as the most serious barrier they faced. On the other hand, curriculum and methods issues were not seen as a serious barrier due to the internal flexibility that they had within their district's managed-instructional model.

Table 11 Principals' Responses to Their Role in Functional Areas and
Whether These Areas Are Seen as Serious Barriers to Effective School Leadership

Function	% of Principals Who Identified a Limited Role	% Who Have a Limited Role, and who Believe it is a Serious Barrier	% of ALL Principals Who Identified Area as a Serious Barrier
Determining the number and type of faculty and staff positions within your budget	83.3%	70.0%	58.3%
Allocating resources for materials, textbooks, maintenance, equipment, and so forth	58.3%	42.9%	25.0%
Hiring teachers and support staff*	91.7%	90.9%	83.3%
Determining teacher pay or bonuses	100.0%	16.7%	16.7%
Assigning teachers and support staff	33.3%	100.0%	33.3%
Transferring unsuitable teachers or support staff	66.7%	87.5%	58.3%
Discharging unsuitable teachers or support staff	58.3%	85.7%	50.0%
Assigning noninstructional duties to teachers and support staff	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Determining teacher and student schedules	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Controlling key features of the school calendar	66.7%	25.0%	16.7%
Allocating time for instruction	33.3%	25.0%	8.3%
Determining extracurricular activities	41.7%	20.0%	8.3%
Making program adoption decisions	83.3%	40.0%	33.3%
Pacing and sequencing decisions about curriculum	75.0%	22.2%	16.7%
Determining methods and materials	58.3%	14.3%	8.3%
Determining student discipline policies/procedures	25.0%	33.3%	8.3%
Controlling student dress	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Setting parental involvement requirements	41.7%	40.0%	16.7%
Determining how much time you spend on instructional versus operational issues	16.7%	50.0%	8.3%
Controlling the school facility	25.0%	33.3%	8.3%
Engaging in private fundraising	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%

* Identified as the "most serious" barrier by the mid-western state principals who were interviewed.

When the same data were examined based on school status (high performing, average performing, or low performing), some differences among the school principals' responses emerged[4] (Table 12, Figure 4, Figure 5). In particular, the principals of the low-performing schools identified a limited role in the assignment, transferring, and hiring of teachers and staff within their school as serious barriers to their leadership. The principals of the higher-performing schools also indicated that they had a limited role in these areas, but fewer identified them as being a serious barrier to school leadership.

Table 12 Principals' Responses to Areas in Which They Have a LIMITED ROLE That They Identify as Being a SERIOUS BARRIER to Effective School Leadership, by School Status

	LIMITED ROLE			SERIOUS BARRIER		
FUNCTION	High (n = 2)	Average (n = 8)	Low (n = 2)	High (n = 2)	Average (n = 8)	Low (n = 2)
Number/type of faculty and staff	50.0%	87.5%	100.0%	50.0%	62.5%	50.0%
Allocating resources	50.0%	62.5%	50.0%	0.0%	37.5%	0.0%
Hiring	100.0%	87.5%	100.0%	100.0%	75.0%	100.0%
Teacher pay or bonuses	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%
Assigning teachers	50.0%	25.0%	50.0%	50.0%	25.0%	50.0%
Transferring unsuitable teachers*	50.0%	62.5%	100.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Discharging unsuitable teachers*	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%	50.0%	37.5%	100.0%
Assigning noninstructional duties	50.0%	12.5%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Teacher and student schedules*	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Controlling school calendar	50.0%	87.5%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	50.0%
Allocating time for instruction	50.0%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%
Determining extracurricular activities	50.0%	37.5%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Program adoption decisions	50.0%	87.5%	100.0%	50.0%	25.0%	50.0%
Curriculum pacing and sequencing	50.0%	87.5%	50.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%
Methods and materials	0.0%	75.0%	50.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%
Student discipline policies/procedures	0.0%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%
Controlling student dress	50.0%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Parental involvement requirements	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	12.5%	50.0%
Time spent on instructional versus operational issues	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%
Controlling the school facility	0.0%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%
Engaging in private fundraising	0.0%	12.5%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

* One principal did not answer this question.

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[4] The sample size is too small to make any general conclusions.

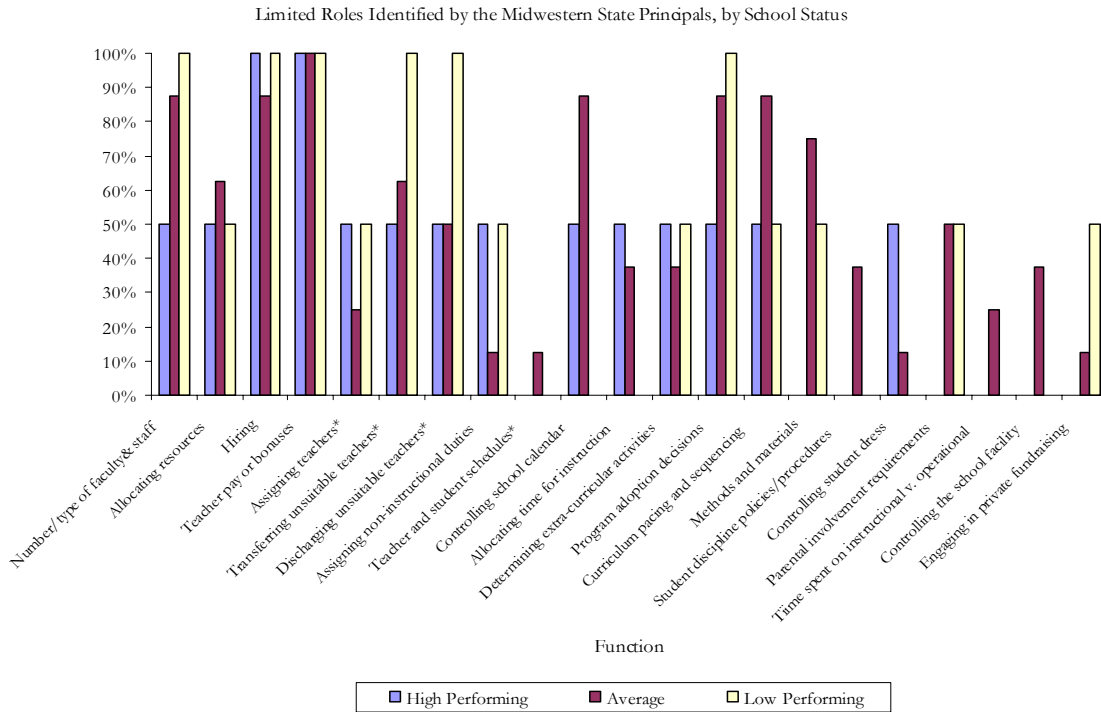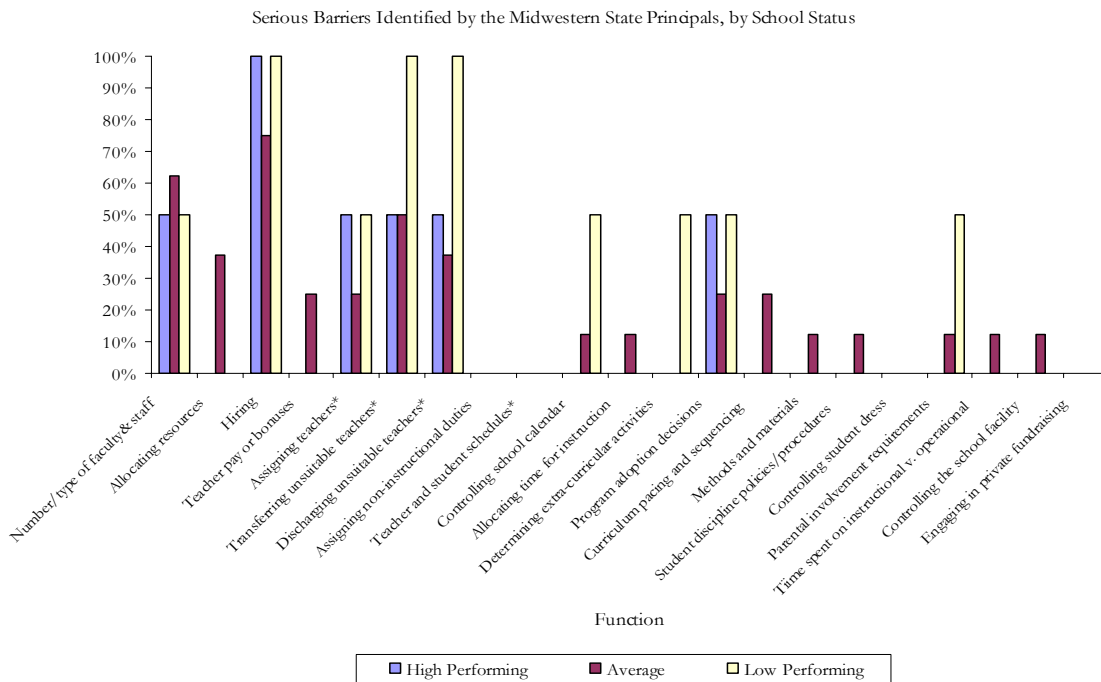# Figure 4 Areas Principals Identified in Which They Have a Limited Role

Limited Roles Identified by the Midwestern State Principals, by School Status

Function

■ High Performing   ■ Average   □ Low Performing

Figure 5 Areas Principals Identified as a Serious Barrier to Effective School Leadership, by School Status

Serious Barriers Identified by the Midwestern State Principals, by School Status

Function

■ High Performing   ■ Average   □ Low Performing

Principals suggested myriad ways to overcome identified barriers. Political savvy was at the core of their responses. Because very few of the principals had control over which teachers were in

their building, much of the discussion centered on "winning over" and motivating the staff. Being an effective "people manager" was another way in which they described this effort. Including staff in school wide decision making was a key strategies to getting staff invested in the school programs. Managing their staff also entailed identifying key people among the staff to move an instructional agenda that would improve student achievement. While they suggested many ways to win over the staff, the lack of control over who worked in the school buildings created barriers. This lack of control became especially challenging when the principals attempted to get their staff to adhere to a consistent vision and program for instructional improvement, which the principals believed would result in higher student achievement levels. As much as these principals were the leaders of their schools, they pushed forward a sense that they still needed to gain the support of many communities both inside (teachers, staff, students) and outside (parents, district, community) their school buildings to accomplish their goals.

IX. Skills for Effective Leadership

The majority of principals indicated that the skills of building community, communicating, making decisions, analyzing data and using this information for decisions, and managing and evaluating teachers were very important to being an effective school leader (Table 13). However, the most interesting aspect of these results is that certain skills were not seen as being very important, namely, curriculum design, curriculum evaluation, and the development of a teacher and staff accountability system. In interviews, principals indicated that although oversight of these tasks was important, the expertise in these areas was under the domain of the teachers and in the hands of the district staff functioning under a managed-instruction theory of action.

As a follow-up question, principals were asked if they needed more training in the skill areas that they identified as very important. In some interviews, principals stated that some of these skills would be difficult to develop in a training or professional development session; rather, on-the-job experience was the only way to hone these skills (e.g., make decisions, persevere in challenging situations). Based on the skills identified as very important, more than 50% of the principals said they could use more training in the following areas: making decisions (50.0%), persevering in challenging situations (58.3%), managing teachers and staff (54.5%), functioning in an environment of cultural differences (54.5%), and making data-driven decisions (63.6%).

Table 13 School Principals Identified Effective School Leadership Skills and Areas for Additional Training

SKILLS	Public Schools	
	% of Principals Who Indicated This Skill was VERY IMPORTANT to Effective School Leadership	**Of Those Who Indicated the Skill is "Very Important," the % Principals Indicating They Could Use MORE TRAINING in This Area**
Build a community of support	100.0%	33.3%
Evaluate classroom teachers	100.0%	25.0%
Communicate effectively (internally)	100.0%	50.0%
Promote collegiality through collaboration	100.0%	41.7%
Make decisions	100.0%	50.0%
Persevere in challenging situations	100.0%	58.3%
Build a community of learners	91.7%	27.3%
Manage and analyze data	91.7%	45.5%
Make data-driven decisions	91.7%	63.6%
Manage teachers and staff	91.7%	54.5%
Function in an environment of cultural differences	91.7%	54.5%
Communicate effectively (externally)	83.3%	30.0%
Resolve conflicts	83.3%	30.0%
Develop and communicate a vision	83.3%	60.0%
Take risks	75.0%	22.2%
Develop a teacher/staff performance accountability system	66.7%	62.5%
Manage business and financial administration	58.3%	42.9%
Evaluate curriculum	58.3%	42.9%
Experimentation	50.0%	33.3%
Design curriculum	25.0%	66.7%

Principals were asked via open-ended response questions which skills they felt were essential to effective school leadership and what skills they admired in past mentors. When discussing which skills were essential to effective school leadership, frequent responses were creativity and resourcefulness, communication, managing resources, and staying positive. The skills the principals valued in their mentors included integrity, perseverance in the face of adversity, effective communication, and the ability to build enduring relationships. They believed their mentors overcame barriers by not seeing them as such, but instead by visualizing solutions and using the power of personality and experience to make positive changes. When asked to

elaborate on this issue, the principals suggested that on-the-job "coaching" would be an effective means of training principals.

X. Conclusion

The midwestern state's principals grappled with a number of issues that made their tenure as school leaders challenging. The combination of federal, state, and district issues brought about increased accountability measures for their schools. Although the principals admitted they were imperfect, it appeared that these accountability measures were aligned with their internal school strategies.

Effective School Leadership and Principals' Ability to Exercise School Leadership

Principals in both districts accepted the role of the district as the central locus of control over curriculum and programmatic decisions. However, to function within the dynamics of a managed instruction district, they felt it was important for them to have control over issues of hiring staff and transferring and discharging teachers, as well as decisions over budgets and the school calendar.

Principals were readily able to identify the areas in which their influence was essential to being effective school leaders, and in many cases, they felt they were more than able to be effective leaders. Still, their inability to influence who was teaching and working within their school buildings tested and challenged their capabilities. Lack of control over the budget also proved challenging. It limited principals' ability to extend school days and make decisions about student needs. Additionally, the competition with charter schools (particularly their advantage in being able to extend school days) created further budget instability as public schools were consistently losing students and the funds connected to them to the charter schools. Another budgetary problem arose from the funds the school received when they did not meet the state- and federally mandated AYP. These school principals felt fortunate to receive extra funds that contributed to extended school hours and tutoring, which improved academic achievement; however, as soon as they made AYP, they lost these funds. The principals who had this experience felt that removing the funds undermined their efforts to support students who truly need the extra time and one-on-one tutoring to succeed. This proved to be a point of frustration for the school principals.

The analysis of actual principal autonomy shows that among the principals interviewed, differences arose based on factors such as years of experience in the district, years of experience as a principal, and each principal's school status. Though the difference is slight, the district veterans felt they had more autonomy over staffing issues than those principals with less experience in the district. On the other hand, those principals with less than 20 years of experience in the district felt they had the same or more autonomy in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and allocating resources. The years of experience as principal revealed fewer differences among principals, but school status seemed to reveal some differences between principals.

Barriers

The biggest challenge these principals faced was staffing issues. As we know, staffing in our schools is one of the key commodities that dictate school quality, and without control over these issues, principals relied on personality, resourcefulness, and political savvy to create the best school environment possible. Unfortunately, this resulted in challenges for less-experienced principals who were unaccustomed to how the system works and unaware of the key players in the district. This was especially troublesome in the two urban midwestern states' districts because nearly all of the principals came from the district and had been in the district for a decade or longer before becoming a principal. Developing expertise from within the district is laudable in that it ensures the investment the principal, as the school leader, has in the community; however, it can put those who are newer to the district at a disadvantage.

Union contracts and district human resource policy make hiring the ideal teacher candidate, transferring unsuitable teachers and staff, and firing unsuitable teachers and staff a nearly impossible task for these principals. The seniority clause within the union contract forced principals to fill vacant positions with less than ideal candidates because of a teacher's years in the system, rather than the type of experience and skills the candidate brought to the position. While transferring unsuitable teachers and staff was easier than discharging them, it was also an extremely difficult proposition for the principals. Although most principals agreed that transfer was possible, the process as dictated by the union contract and district policy required an

inordinate amount of the principals' already limited time and forced principals to make sacrifices in other areas for which they were responsible. The function of discharging unsuitable teachers and staff followed a similar though more intense process, which required the sacrifice of the principal's time and attention. Regrettably, even with this effort, the desired result of removing the teacher or staff person from the school may not occur. Therefore, principals had to decide to continue with the teachers and staff they were given or learn informal strategies that encouraged unsuitable teachers and staff to leave. More experienced principals described combining their efforts to live with teachers who were not ideal, but managed them well and employed strategies that encourage unsuitable staff to leave.

Budget constraints were another undercurrent that challenged a principal's ability to exercise effective leadership. There were three primary factors in this barrier: (a) district budget allocation, (b) charter schools, and (c) federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) funds. The district budget allocations challenged the principals, as they do in any urban district; however, principals from MW-District 1 felt that this was a bigger issue than did principals in MW-District 2. It is unclear what contributed to this difference, though it is possible the funding mechanism and the number of students attending the charter schools from within the district were at play. Therefore, the charter schools were drawing more students and the funds that follow these students away from the district-operated schools. The increase in student enrollment in the charter schools corresponded to a reduced budget. The public (non-charter) schools were uncertain of the changes to their budgets until later in the budget cycle. This made planning for the future extremely challenging. Another challenge was the additional federal NCLB funds that the schools designated as in need of improvement, used to enhance services and offerings to students. The issue was not the receipt of NCLB funding itself, but rather that when a school principal effectively used the funds to improve student achievement through additional tutoring and/or extending the school day, the school would meet its improvement targets and the funds would no longer be available. Principals felt that these funds were integral to improvements in student achievement and taking them away after showing improvement jeopardized their ongoing progress.

Charter school competition proved to be an issue encompassing more than just a smaller school budget. Principals explained that they were bound to honor the union contract and policies that limited the number of hours teachers can work. Additionally, budget constraints did not allow for additional funds to pay teachers to work longer hours for either extended-day services or professional development opportunities. The combination of these factors made competing with charter schools—which were able to extend their school day without being under the constraint of the union and district policies—nearly impossible.

Ultimately, principals felt that it was not that they did not know what would improve their school and student achievement, but the constraints found in union contracts, district human resource policies, and budgets (local and federal) as well as the competition of charter schools that made the principal's job of raising student achievement levels challenging. Yet many of the principals felt they had some ability to exercise autonomy overall. Experience, knowing how to work the system, and knowing the right people in the district contribute to a de facto autonomy which supported these efforts. Additionally, it seems that the status of the school affected the degree of the principal's autonomy. Although this would need further research to come to any firm set of conclusions, the proposition is an interesting one.

Skills for Effective School Leaders

Communication, collaboration, building community, managing data, and making data-driven decisions were all essential to the effective school leader; however, the most frequently mentioned skills were those that were not as easy to hone through professional development or training. Political savvy, experience, and the ability to see opportunity in the face of adversity were all identified as key to being an effective school principal. The position of the principal is that of a middle manager, who must manage what is going on in their school while simultaneously working with the district and possibly the state to obtain the resources the school needs. Other constituencies, such as the community, parents, and local business are also influential players in what can and cannot happen within a school. According to these principals, an effective school leader must work to develop a coherent vision that all of the school stakeholders can buy into, whether they are inside or outside the school.