The Profile of the "Ready" Assistant Principal as Instructional Leader in Alabama

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the characteristics of assistant principals in Alabama who perceived themselves "ready" as instructional leaders in schools, and to identify the factors that contribute to their perception of readiness. In addition, we asked assistant principals to identify their mentoring needs pertaining to becoming more effective instructional leaders, and where they were most likely to receive the mentoring. Data was collected from the survey responses of 461 assistant principals. Four key findings were: 1) years of experience as a teacher and the age of the assistant principal had no significance when it came to being ready as an instructional leader; 2) those who graduated from leadership preparation programs before 2009 reported being more ready than those who graduated after 2009; 3) although a majority of respondents reported that their current role required that 50% or more of their time is to be spent on instructional leadership, 63% of them had no idea what percentage of their evaluation was based on instructional leadership performance; and 4) ready principals received their most valuable mentoring from informal meetings with other assistant principals and one-on-one with their current principal.

The role of school leaders has become more challenging and complex as a result of the last two decades of mandated reform coupled with rapidly changing demographics, technology advances, and dwindling financial support for schools (Fink, 2010). In this era of high stakes accountability in schools, there has been an increased emphasis placed on student outcomes. Teachers, however, cannot produce improving student achievement results without a highly effective principal leading the school (McEwan, 2003). Researchers Leithwood, Louis,

Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) found that the principal's leadership accounts for about 20% of the school's impact on student achievement, second only to the impact of teachers. The principal's role as the instructional leader of a school has become an important topic in educational leadership research, especially in the last decade. Instructional leadership behaviors of effective principals have been identified, (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) although researchers acknowledge that the principal's effect on student achievement is mostly indirect, as the principal chiefly affects teacher behavior, which in turn, impacts student achievement (Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu, & Kington (2009); Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003).

The role of the assistant principal as instructional leader, however, has been largely neglected in educational leadership literature (Armstrong, 2010; Hunt, 2011). In a search of Dissertation Abstracts Online, only three dissertations were found on the topic of assistant principals since the year 2000. The paucity of research on the assistant principalship is somewhat surprising considering that this position is most often the entry point into formal school leadership. According to Harris and Lowery (2004), the role of the assistant principal has come to mirror the complexity of the role of the principal, including leadership of the instructional program. With so little research being conducted on the assistant principal, how can we ascertain the capacity of the assistant principal to perform the role of an instructional leader, rather than operating in the traditional managerial roles of the past? How can we better prepare those who will begin their careers as assistant principals and who will encounter the same performance evaluation systems as senior principals that judge their ability to lead instruction?

We designed a comprehensive study to answer the overarching question: What is the capacity of assistant principals to be instructional leaders?. In this paper, we report the findings related to two selected subquestions of the study: 1) What are the characteristics of the assistant principals who self-report as ready to be instructional leaders? and 2)What are the mentoring needs of assistant principals who want to be more effective as instructional leaders and where do they receive this mentoring? We begin with an overview of relevant research literature pertaining to instructional leadership and the impact this research has had on educational leadership standards and preparation in the United States. Then, we review the traditional and changing role of the assistant principal, and the mentoring possibilities for those performing in this position of "second chair" leadership of a school. We describe the methodology employed in this study and report the findings that pertain to the research questions posed here. In conclusion, we discuss the findings and outline the implications for educational leadership preparation programs.

Review of Relevant Literature

Assistant principals who have taken on this role in the last decade have encountered the rapid, ongoing demands for improvement of schools and student achievement that have resulted from federal mandates and educational reforms (Armstrong, 2010). During this same time period, university preparation program faculty have been redesigning the curricula to address the new emphasis on the principal/assistant principal as instructional leader as required in revised national standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Darling-Hammond, LaPoint, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007: Orr & Orphanos, 2011). In this review of literature relevant to our study, we describe the conceptual framework for the study (instructional leadership), the impact that this concept has had on standards for leadership preparation, and then conclude with describing the roles of assistant principals as an instructional leader and their need for mentoring.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is a term that was introduced in the 1970s, but the definition was somewhat elusive for decades (Neumerski, 2012). Educational researchers of the 1970s observed that effective schools had a principal who was an instructional leader (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds, 1981; Lezotte, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1985). There was a notion that principals of effective schools focused more on teaching and learning than on management, but there was still no definition or a clear identification of the particular behaviors and skills of these more effective principals (Neumerski, 2012). The reform eras of the 1980s and 1990s brought a sharper focus on the behaviors that an instructional leader demonstrated. Neumerski (2012) summarized that that the instructional leader:

- was visible and observing classrooms and giving feedback to teachers
- could inspire others with a common vision
- was a strong disciplinarian
- was a curricular specialist
- could evaluate student achievement, and
- could build school culture and communicate high expectations.

In 1982, with a revision in1990, Hallinger created a tool for measuring instructional leadership, called the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), in which he identified 50 essential instructional leadership behaviors (Hallinger, 1982/1990). These were organized under three dimensions: (1) defining the school's mission, (1) managing the instructional program, and (3) promoting a positive school learning climate. These became so widely accepted by the education community, that by 2007, the PIMRS had been utilized in over 199 research studies of effective principals (Hallinger, 2008).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) have studied instructional leadership and identified critical characteristics of the learning-focused leader. At the school building level, the formal school leader is expected to understand and recognize quality instruction, and have enough knowledge of the curriculum to ascertain whether or not appropriate content is being taught in all classrooms (Marzano et al., 2005). This means that the leader is capable of giving constructive feedback to teachers on how they can improve instruction and can design a system for others to provide this support as well. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) determined that instructional leadership should be called learning-centered leadership because it pertains to leadership practices that focus on planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning. In their meta-analysis of the direct and indirect impact of leadership on student achievement, Robinson and colleagues found that the more principals focused on teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008).

Recent comprehensive research on instructional leadership has been conducted by Wahlstrom, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) labeled the *Learning from Leadership Project: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning*. In their findings, they noted that the actions exemplary principals take can be described in two broad categories: Instructional Climate and Instructional Actions. Instructional Climate involves steps that principals take to set a tone and create a culture in a building that supports continued professional learning. Instructional Actions are explicit steps that principals take to interact with teachers about their own improvement. In their subsequent book publication based on this research, Leithwood and Seashore Lewis (2012) summarized that instructional leadership is a combination of behaviors demonstrated by the school leader that can be further detailed as follows:

(a) *Setting direction* (i.e., building and sustaining a shared vision for student achievement, fostering acceptance of group goals, articulating high performance expectations, staying aware of external influences),

(b) *Developing people* (i.e., expanding knowledge about what constitutes quality teaching, providing formal and informal professional development for staff, being available),

(c) *Focusing on learning* (i.e., discussing instructional strategies and student learning with teachers, using observation and assessment data to initiate reflective conversations with teachers about achievement goals, using data to inform decisions about the instructional program, conducting action research to improve professional practice and student performance), and

(d) *Improving the instructional program* (i.e., designing a system of collaboration and support for teachers through professional learning communities, monitoring classrooms regularly, providing essential instructional materials and resources).

Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) are quick to point out that policy makers and practitioners should be cautious about thinking of instructional leadership as actions that focus on classroom instruction alone. As indicated by the above descriptions of their four domains of instructional leadership, many of the leadership practices pertain to the wider context of the school organization, and are actually non-instructional elements. As they point out, "successful principal leadership includes careful attention to classroom instructional practices, but it also includes careful attention to many other issues that are critical to the ongoing health and welfare of school organizations" (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012, p. 67).

Similarly, Sharratt and Fullan (2012) asked over 500 educators what leadership qualities would be necessary to lead schools to improve student outcomes through the use of achievement data. When they asked participants "What are the top three leadership skills needed to put faces on the data?,"

> 45 percent responded that to lead with credibility, leaders must first model knowledge of classroom practice – assessment and instruction – what we call *know-ability.* Further, 33 percent said that the ability to inspire and mobilize others through clear communication of commitment was essential – what we call *mobilize-ability*. Finally, 21 percent said that knowing how to establish a culture of shared responsibility and accountability was crucial – what we call *sustain-ability*. These are the three factors that represent a specific focus by leaders to get results. (Sharratt & Fullan, 2012, pp. 157-158)

To balance this, however, Robinson (2010) makes a very important observation about the prolific research on instructional leadership: "evidence about effective leadership practices is not the same as evidence about the capabilities that leaders need to confidently engage in those practices" (p. 2). According to Robinson (2010), researchers often list the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that a leader needs to demonstrate, as if these three terms are separate, stand-alone entities. She characterizes the term 'leadership capability' as embodying the dynamic integration of those three terms. She illustrates it thus:

> While the act of giving teachers useful feedback might be categorized as a skill, it involves knowledge (knowing what to say about the quality of their teaching), skill (knowing how to say it), and deeply personal qualities such as open-mindedness and good intent. If the three components are separated out, an immediate disjunction is

> created between the leadership specification and the integrated reality of leadership practice. (Robinson, 2010, p. 3)

To summarize, the research linking instructional leadership to improved student achievement is strong. Almost every study of school improvement points to "the need for strong, academically-focused principal leadership" (Calman, 2010, p. 17). Principals must be knowledgeable about high-yield best classroom practices if they are to be champions for teaching and learning. The principal as instructional leader must be "the lead learner, modeling continuous learning, committing to being a co-leader and co-learner with teachers, and participating in tangible assessment and instructional practices as a "knowledgeable other"" (Sharratt, Ostinelli, & Cattaneo, 2010).

The Impact of Research on Educational Leadership Standards and Programs

Policy makers have become very interested in the research on instructional leadership. As an example, the U. S. Council of Chief State School Officers revised the 1997 standards for educational leaders in 2008, based on the decade of research on instructional leadership (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). These are referred to as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards, commonly called ISLLC 2008. The standards were designed to provide a U. S. nationwide foundation for state and local standards development. After this revision, many states created state-specific standards and mandated the overhaul of educational leadership preparation programs to align with the new standards. These standards are currently undergoing yet another revision (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

The evolution to the emphasis on instructional leadership at the national level produced the need for changes in performance evaluations for school leaders. According to Porter, Feldman and Knapp (2006), a trend emerged in principal evaluations that gave attention to 1)

assessing principal behaviors, not just traits, 2) aligning assessment to standards, 3) giving consideration to student achievement results, 4) taking school context into consideration, and 5) using the evaluations to prompt leadership development. By 2010, as the time approached for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the U. S. Department of Education "called for states and districts to develop and implement systems of teacher and principal evaluations and support and to identify effective and highly effective teachers and principals on the basis of student growth and other factors" (U. S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 4). The Department officials further stated that the school leader evaluations should align with definitions of principal effectiveness, differentiate levels of performance, and provide feedback that would help principals improve their performance.

As one example of a response to this call, professors at Vanderbilt University developed the VAL-ED™ tool that would serve the needs of states for an evaluation instrument that had strong theoretical and psychometric foundations. The assessment measured six core components and six key processes of principal behavior that are associated with learning-centered leadership (Murphy, Goldring, Cravens, Elliot, & Porter, 2011). The six core components are high standards of performance, rigorous curriculum, quality instruction, culture of learning and professional behavior, connections to external conditions, and systemic performance accountability.

Revised Leadership Standards in Alabama

In Alabama, where this research study was conducted, the State Department of Education began to prioritize the preparation of instructional leaders after Governor Bob Riley convened the Governor's Congress on School Leadership in 2004. The Congress resulted in "an unmistakable statewide paradigm shift to a firm belief that Alabama's principals must be

instructional leaders as opposed to school administrators" (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). Under the guidance of the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) and with support from the Wallace Foundation, new Alabama Instructional Leadership Standards were enacted by legislation, and all 13 university school leadership programs had redesigned their curricula (under state mandate) beginning in 2007. In addition, the professional learning requirements for leader re-certification were overhauled (2008), and a new instructional leader formative evaluation system was developed. All Alabama university leadership preparation programs were required to include provisions for effective mentoring in their internships in their redesign. The goal was to make sure that aspiring principals/ assistant principals were paired with excellent instructional leader role models.

By 2009, the first graduates of the redesigned educational leadership preparation programs were entering school leadership positions. From that point on, all aspiring school leaders would receive curriculum in the university preparation programs based on the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leadership.

Standards Compared to Leadership Reality

The evidence cited thus far points to the paradigm shift in the role of the school leader from administrator to instructional leader. However, the reality of life in schools and the daily demands on principals may inhibit their ability to meet the expectations for instructional leadership. In a survey conducted by Hirsch, Freitas, and Vilar (2008) on working conditions for K-12 educators in Alabama, to ascertain where principals were in the paradigm shift, principals indicated that they were generally positive about their district leadership and professional development toward becoming instructional leaders. However, "they were less positive about the time pressure they feel, their inability to devote significant time to practicing instructional

leadership, and their lack of training and skills to coach and remediate teachers who are weak instructors" (Southern Regional Education Board, p. 13). When asked "In which areas do you need additional support to effectively lead your school?," the top answer was "instructional leadership" (41%), followed by "teacher remediation/coaching" (38%), "data-driven decision making" (36%), "student assessment" (31%), and "school improvement planning" (27%) (Hirsch, Freitas, & Vilar, 2008). If this is the way that *senior* principals feel, it could be speculated that assistant principals feel the same pressures, as well.

The Alabama report revealed that principals' time demands inhibited their efforts to be instructional leaders (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). An astounding 88% of principals reported spending less than five hours a week on instructional planning with teachers and 74% reported spending no more than five hours a week observing and coaching teachers (with half of those spending three or fewer hours). The report writers concluded with the following recommendation: "As Alabama focuses on transforming the role of the principalship into instructional leadership, it should work with districts to explore and implement strategies that can increase the amount of time principals and assistant principals can devote to leading instruction" (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010, p. 17). No specific recommendations were made as to what those strategies might be. Furthermore, in the report, the assistant principal's role as instructional leader was not mentioned.

The Assistant Principal as Instructional Leader

The entry-level school administrator in the United States is most often the assistant principal. This individual typically comes from a one-classroom perspective as a teacher, but is immediately given responsibility as second-in-command of an entire school (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The new administrator has had university courses in leadership theories, decision-making,

school law and finance, curriculum design, public relations, school management basics, and in most states, ten or more days of an internship as an introduction to the "real world" of leadership. However, this may not fully prepare the new assistant principal to be the all-important *instructional leader* (Armstrong, 2010). As one assistant principal in Armstrong's (2010) study noted: "a lot of the skills that are required as an administrator haven't been touched when we go through the principals' programs" (p. 699). Other participants in the study used phrases like "sink or swim," "jumping off the deep end," "swimming against the tide," and "baptism by fire" (p. 701) in referring to their entrance into the assistant principal position.

According to Harris and Lowery (2004), the role of the assistant principal has come to mirror the complexity of the role of the principal, including leadership of the instructional program. Assistant principals often feel inadequate for this aspect of the role (Armstrong, 2010). One barrier to assistant principals becoming instructional leaders is the intensity and stress of the job relative to their typical assignments in the school. The role of the assistant principal has not changed significantly in 25 years. For example, in an early study conducted with assistant principals in Maine, researchers found that assistants, working an average of 55 hours per week, spent their largest portion of time in student management issues (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). Dealing with student discipline, contacting parents, and supervising extra-curricular activities after school and on weekends were consistent fixtures in the role. The next highest allotment of time was spent in personnel management (schedules, substitute teachers, teacher evaluations). Relatively lower amounts of time were allocated for professional development. Those assistant principals who participated in the fewest professional development programs for administrators were also less likely to engage in professional reading, in-service workshops or courses for

professional growth. Finally, assistant principals in Maine spent the least time on instructional leadership and resource management (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991).

In a review of studies on assistant principals, Scoggins and Bishop (1993) found 20 duties common to the assistant principal. These duties include "discipline, attendance, student activities, staff support and evaluation, building supervision, guidance, co-curricular activities, athletics, community agencies, master schedules, fill in for principal, building operations, budget, reports, transportation, curriculum, communications, cafeteria, school calendar, and lock and lockers" (Scoggins & Bishop, 1993, p. 40).

Marshall and Mitchell (1991) note that prior research revealed strong evidence that these patterns are constant over time, meaning that even though changes come and go in education, the assistant principal's role remains the same – steeped in management. Hartzell (1990) and Hartzell, Williams, and Nelson (1995) also examined the work lives of assistant principals in their first year in the role. Their studies concluded with the following themes: (1) most beginning assistant principals do not understand the nature of the assistant principalship**;** (2) new assistant principals often lack needed skills**;** (3) the assistant principalship does not prepare the assistant for the principalship; and (4) becoming an assistant principal brings professional and personal changes (Hartzell, 1990; Hartzell et al., 1995).

Fast-forward to the most recent decade of research on the assistant principal's role, and it becomes evident that the duties of the assistant principal have changed very little from those described in the research of the early 1990's, despite new demands for the assistant principal to become more involved in instructionally-related tasks (Sun, 2012). A study by Hunt (2011) reported that assistant principal roles are still largely focused on managerial tasks. Supervision of events, student discipline, parent conferences after discipline, and teacher / support staff

evaluations were listed as their chief responsibilities. Only 50% of the principals surveyed by Hunt mentioned work with curriculum or instruction. Armstrong (2014) surveyed 290 assistant principals in Ontario and found that the barriers they experienced in performing as instructional leaders involved demands for excessive documentation and paperwork, dealing with crises, and responding to conflicting demands from school stakeholders. "Additional areas of challenge were related to increased external accountability matched with diminished power" (Armstrong, 2014, p. 30) to influence any change in staff and student learning. Armstrong's (2014) study revealed that new assistant principals described their workloads as physically and emotionally stressful, "especially when they were unable to define their role parameters and/or did not have the time, technical skills and procedural knowledge required to complete everyday managerial and disciplinary tasks" (p. 30). Adding to the challenges of trying to learn the management side of leadership, assistant principals are being asked to spend time in classrooms conducting teacher observations and evaluations, working with curriculum changes, collecting and interpreting test data, and leading problem-solving teams. However, the assistant principal is often confused, because as Armstrong (2010) noted in her research, the assistant principals "had been promoted because of their instructional skills and curriculum expertise, but teachers generally discounted or ignored their suggestions" (p. 703).

Additional stressors for the assistant principal have been identified by Matthews and Crow (2003). They are isolated from their former teaching peers, which causes psychological withdrawal from a former support group. At the same time they are redefining their identity as an administrator, they are being tested by others. They immediately are put in front line positions where they are dealing with a range of stakeholders - students, parents, teachers, community members, and senior administrators (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003). Yet,

assistant principals taking the job in the last decade have faced the same demands for instructional leadership as their senior principals, due to the rapid, ongoing educational reforms calling for increased student achievement and building-level compliance with mandated changes. Leadership preparation programs may not prepare the assistant principal for the emotional stress of the role of "being at the epicenter of school activity" (Armstrong, 2014, p. 702). This points to the need for mentoring for assistant principals.

Mentoring for Assistant Principals

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2003) reported that new principals are traditionally "thrown into their jobs without a lifejacket" (p. 8), unprepared for the demands of the position. Accountability pressures center around the demand that principals must know how to supervise the instructional program that results in continuous improvement in student outcomes. Researchers have established that new principals will need mentoring and at least 32 states are requiring this mentoring through legislation (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Villani, 2006). Often, however, this does not include mentoring for the assistant principals. Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) espouse that since the assistant principal position is a necessary position in schools, we ought to explore the importance of a mentoring relationship between the senior principal and the assistant principal. They believe that "the principal has a strong responsibility to serve as a mentor for the assistant principal" (p. 67). Marshall and Hooley (2006) note, however, that the most common behaviors of new assistant principals is to enact the role the same way they saw their predecessors perform. Unfortunately, that usually results in maintaining the status quo. Hartzell et al. (1995) advocate a different approach and advise that the assistant principal must take the initiative to promote his/her own influence by building a strong relationship with exemplary principals. It certainly stands to

reason that the new assistant principal will need mentoring, but the dilemma remains from whence it will come.

In Alabama, a 2010 mandate required that new principals receive two years of mentoring, and a State Department of Education formal New Principal Mentoring Program was put in place to support that (Alabama State Department of Education, 2011). School districts could use the state's formal program or implement one of their own design. The stated goals of the New Principal Mentoring Program were to:

> 1) ensure there is support for new principals; 2)increase the number of "successful beginnings" while reducing the number of "rookie mistakes"; 3) provide modeling, guidance, coaching, and encouragement, in a one-on-one relationship in order to inspire new principals and build skills and confidence; 4)ensure that new principals have a clear set of priorities, focused on instructional leadership; and 5) produce highly qualified instructional leaders equipped with the knowledge, abilities, and behaviors needed for effective instructional leadership, resulting in greater student achievement. (Alabama State Department of Education, 2011, p. 3)

However, this mandate was for newly-seated *senior* principals, not assistants. The state-level educators may assume that the senior principals would be mentoring the assistant principals, and perhaps that does happen in some instances. However, there is no requirement or formal program for new assistant principal mentoring. New assistant principals are usually on their own to learn how to do the job, or at best, are the recipients of sporadic, informal advice-giving sessions (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). The lack of a mentoring program for Alabama assistant principals may be a serious gap in the preparation of instructional leaders for the schools. New assistant principals should not have to wait until they are senior principals

to receive the mentoring they need to be effective instructional leaders. As noted in a white paper by The University Council for Educational Administration:

> Potential assistant principals largely approach the assistant principal position as a training ground for the principalship and look for principals who will afford them growth opportunities and exposure to a spectrum of responsibilities reflective of their future positions. Such exposure will benefit not only the individual, but ultimately the future of the profession, for it is the quality of assistant principals' learning and growth that helps determine the quality of tomorrow's principals. (The University Council for Educational Administration, 2012, p. 8)

Through the above citations, it is clear to see that there needs to be more attention given to creating supportive conditions for assistant principal instructional leadership development, and mentoring may be one of the chief ways this can occur.

Method

This mixed methods study was conducted between October, 2013, and April, 2014 in the State of Alabama, with approval from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board. It is believed to be one of the most comprehensive studies of assistant principals in any one state in the United States to this date. The central research question for the larger study from which this report was derived was "What is the perceived capacity of assistant principals in Alabama to be instructional leaders and how would mentoring assist them in this role?" The conceptual framework for the study was based on the work of Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) and their description of instructional leadership, which is characterized as a combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions demonstrated by the school leader, revealing his or her active engagement in setting direction, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the

instructional program. This description was repeated throughout the survey that was utilized in this study.

Participants

Survey research design was used in the current study. One thousand one hundred and fifty practicing assistant principals in State of Alabama received the survey invitation and 581 total responses were received. The response rate was 52.52%. Among these 581 responses, 120 participants did not complete at least 50% of the questions. Therefore, those responses were excluded from data analysis. Only 461 usable survey responses were analyzed with a useable response rate at 41.91%.

Among these 461 assistant principals, 241 (52.3%) of them were females, whereas 218 (47.6%) were males. Two participants did not indicate their gender. Their age groups, years of experience as educators, years of experience as an assistant principal, type of the school in which they currently work, and the district type they work in are shown in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Table 1

Participants' Age Groups by Gender

Age Group	Female	Male	Total
22-30	3 (1.2%)	12 (5.5%)	15 (3.3%)
31-35	17 (7.1%)	31 (14.2%)	48 (10.4%)
36-40	57 (23.7%)	37 (17.0%)	94 (20.4%)
41-45	56 (23.2%)	48 (22.0%)	105 (22.8%)
Over 45	107 (44.4%)	89 (40.8%)	197 (42.7%)
Missing	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.5%)	2 (0.4%)
Total	241 (100.0%)	218 (100.0%)	461 (100%)

Table 2

Participants' Year of Experiences as Educators

Years of Experiences	Total
0-5	51 (11.1%)

Years of Experiences	Total
6-10	156 (33.8%)
11-15	130 (28.2%)
16-20	71 (15.4%)
More than 20	51 (11.1%)
Missing	2 (0.4%)
Total	461 (100.0%)

Table 3

Participants' Year of Experiences as AP

Years of Experiences	Total
1	57 (12.4%)
2	50 (10.8%)
3	34 (7.4%)
4	37 (8.0%)
5 or more	282 (61.2%)
missing	1 (0.2%)
Total	461 (100.0%)

Table 4

Participants' Current School

School Type	Total
Preschool/Kindergarten	2 (0.4%)
Elementary School	116 (25.2%)
Middle School	102 (22.1%)
Junior High School	9 (2.0%)
High School	184 (39.9%)
Others	45 (9.8%)
Missing	3 (0.7%)
Total	461 (100.0%)

Table 5

School District Type the Participants Currently Work in as AP

School District	Total

School District	Total
Large Urban	67 (14.5%)
Midsize Urban	78 (16.9%)
Small City	139 (30.2%)
Predominately Rural	157 (34.1%)
Remote Rural	15 (3.3%)
Missing	5 (1.1%)
Total	461 (100.0%)

Two hundred and fifty-seven (55.7%) of the participants had Master's degrees, and 114 (24.7%) were specialists in Education (Ed.S). In addition, 14 (3.0%) of them had Doctorate degrees, and 74 (16.1%) of them hold the administrative certificate or license only. These participants completed different types of preservice leadership preparation programs, including traditional face-to-face (n=321, 69.5%), hybrid (n=125, 27.1%), and totally online (n=10, 2.2%). Most of them completed the programs in the State of Alabama (n=427, 92.6%), but some of them finished in other states (n=31, 6.7%). In addition, most of them completed the programs before 2009 (n=352, 76.4%) whereas others completed after 2009 (n=107, 23.2%). Further, most of them did not have full-time internships (defined as leaving the classroom for at least one entire semester) (n=339, 73.5%) but some did (n=121, 26.2%).

Instrument

The survey was designed by Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno from the University of Kentucky, and Dr. Linda Searby, from Auburn University, Alabama, as a part of a large two-state study of assistant principals. Survey items were developed and validated by insuring alignment with current literature on assistant principals and the Leithwood and Seashore Lewis (2012) concepts on instructional leadership—setting direction, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the instructional program. In addition, the survey was piloted with an expert panel of both assistant and senior principals and was further refined incorporating the

feedback received from them. The survey consisted of 37 main questions. Among these 37 main questions were 30 multiple choice questions (with several sub-questions in most cases), one four-point Likert-type scale with 9 items, and six open-ended questions. Due to the fact that this survey was a comprehensive survey, not all the survey questions were used to answer the research questions in this paper.

Procedure

The survey was hosted at SurveyMonkey.com and sent out to practicing assistant principals in State of Alabama between October, 2013 and April, 2014. Multiple reminder emails appeared to be effective in recruiting a large number of assistant principals to participate. Responses were downloaded and analyzed by Dr. Chih-hsuan Wang from Auburn University, using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22. Descriptive and Chi-square analyses were conducted in order to answer the research questions.

Results

In order to answer the first research question: "What are the characteristics of assistant principals who self-report as ready to be an instructional leader?", descriptive and a series of Chi-square analyses were used to investigate the relationship between the perception of readiness as an instructional leader and a list of demographic characteristics of the participants. Among the participants, 256 (55.5%) of them indicated they feel ready to be an instructional leader, whereas 188 (40.8%) of them feel somewhat ready. However, 12 (2.6%) of them indicated they feel not ready at all and three (0.7%) assistant principals indicated that they were not responsible for instructional leadership (Table 6).

Table 6

Frequency of Perception of Readiness in Instructional Leadership by Gender

	Female	Male	Total
Very Ready	150 (62.2%)	105 (48.2%)	256 (55.5%)
Somewhat Ready	83 (34.4%)	104 (47.7%)	188 (40.8%)
Not Ready	4 (1.7%)	8 (3.7%)	12 (2.6%)
Not Applicable	2 (0.8)	1 (0.5%)	3 (0.7%)
Missing	2 (0.8)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.4%)
Total	241 (100%)	218 (100%)	461 (100%)

About 61% (n=278) of assistant principals reported that more than 50% of their responsibilities were in the realm of instructional leadership (according to the definition given in the survey) whereas others have less than 50 percent of their job requirements involved with instructional leadership (n=178, 38.6%) (Table 7). Regarding their formal performance evaluation, 18 (3.9%) of them reported that 25% of their evaluation is based on their instructional leadership performance, 62 (13.4%) of them said 50% of their evaluation was based on instructional leadership performance, and 78 (16.9%) of them said that 75% of their evaluation was based on instructional leadership performance. However, more than 60% of participants indicated that they have no idea about what percentage of their performance evaluation is based on instructional leadership or they are not familiar with the evaluation system that is used to judge their performance (n=142, 30.8%; n=153, 33.2%, respectively). Only three (1.1%) assistant principals reported they are not evaluated in the area of instructional leadership (there is no table for this statistic).

Table 7

Position Required as Instructional Leader by Perception of Readiness

	100% Duties	> 50%	25-50%	<25%	0%	Total
Very	66 (26.0%)	118	46 (18.1%)	23 (9.1%)	1 (0.4%)	254

Ready		(46.5%)				(100%)
Somewhat Ready	25 (13.4%)	64 (34.2%)	54 (28.9%)	42 (22.5%)	2 (1.1%)	187 (100%)
Not Ready	2 (16.7%)	2 (16.7%)	5 (41.7%)	3 (25.0%)	0 (0%)	12 (100%)
N/A	0 (0%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (100%)
Total	93 (20.4%)	185 (40.6%)	105 (23.0%)	70 (15.4%)	3 (0.7%)	456 (100%)

The Chi-square results indicated that female assistant principals feel more ready than males ($\chi^2_{(3)}$=11.02, p=.012) to be instructional leaders. In addition, if the preparation program from which they graduated emphasized instructional leadership, they feel more ready to be an instructional leader ($\chi^2_{(9)}$=21.27, p=.011). Further, if their current position required them to have more responsibilities in instructional leadership, they feel more ready ($\chi^2_{(12)}$=42.25, p<.001). The assistant principals who completed their preparation program before 2009 feel more ready to be an instructional leaders than those who completed it after 2009 ($\chi^2_{(3)}$=14.01, p=.003). There were no statistically significant relationships between the perception of readiness as an instructional leader among the different age groups, their years of experiences as a teacher or an assistant principal, their school type or district type in which they work, the degree they received, the types of the preparation program, or if they participated in a full-time internship (Table 8).

Table 8

Chi-square Results of Perception of Readiness and Demographic

Demographic Question	χ^2	*df*	*p*-value
Age	8.04	12	.78
Gender	11.02	3	.01*
Years as Teacher	15.17	12	.23
Years as AP	10.29	12	.59
School Type	14.30	15	.50
School District	8.45	12	.75
Degree	8.63	9	.47
Type of Program	11.02	6	.09
State of Program	1.61	3	.66
Internship	5.04	3	.17
Preparation Program Emphasis	21.27	9	.01*
Complete Program before/after 2009	14.01	3	.003**
Position Emphasis	42.25	12	<.001***

As for teacher leadership activities in which participants were involved before becoming assistant principals and the relationship of those with the assistant principals' perception of readiness in instructional leadership, assistant principals who feel more ready were more likely to

participate in these activities: chair or member of school committee ($\chi^2_{(2)}$=15.01, *p*=.001), committee or taskforce sponsored by educator-oriented professional organization ($\chi^2_{(2)}$=6.80, *p*=.033), officer or executive board member for educator-oriented professional organization ($\chi^2_{(2)}$=7.07, *p*=.029), facilitator of professional development activities for teachers or staff members ($\chi^2_{(2)}$=17.41, *p*<.001), and instructional peer coach ($\chi^2_{(2)}$=8.24, *p*=.016) (see Table 9).

Table 9

Teacher Leadership Activities and the Relationship with Perception of Readiness in Instructional Leaders

Activity	χ^2 (df=2)	*p*-value
Building leadership team or school-based decision making council	5.347	.069
School committee	15.008	.001**
District committee or taskforce	3.570	.168
Statewide committee or taskforce sponsored by state agency	1.181	.554
Committee or taskforce sponsored by educator-oriented professional organization	6.803	.033*
Officer or executive board member for educator-oriented professional organization	7.070	.029*
Coach or sponsor of co-curricular or extracurricular activity	0.365	.833
Department chair of grade-level chair	5.558	.062
Facilitator of professional development activities for teachers or staff members	17.412	<.001***
Instructional peer coach	8.242	.016*
Mentor teacher to a new teacher	.423	.809
Mentor to an aspiring teacher	4.494	.106
National Board Certified teacher	4.485	.106
Principal designee	0.242	.886
Union representative	1.091	.580

For the second research question: ”What are the mentoring needs of assistant principals, and where do they receive this mentoring?” a series of Chi-square analyses was utilized to examine the relationship between the assistant principals’ mentoring needs and their perceptions of readiness in instructional leadership. The results showed that assistant principals who feel very ready were more likely to indicate they do not need mentoring in any of the instructional

leadership areas. However, if they feel somewhat ready or not ready at all, they were more likely to report they need mentoring (see Table 10). In addition, according to the frequency information, participants who self-reported somewhat ready and not ready at all (n=200) indicated that they need mentoring in the following areas (rank ordered): improving the instructional program (n=123, 61.5%), focusing on learning (n=111, 55.5%), setting direction (n=99, 49.5%), and developing people (n=95, 47.5%).

Table 10

Relationship between Mentoring Needs and Perception of Readiness in Instructional Leadership

		No Need	Not Sure	Need Mentoring	χ^2 (df=6) *p*-value
Setting Direction	Ready	149 (60.8%)	29 (11.8%)	67 (27.3%)	42.64 *p*<.001
	Somewhat Ready	60 (32.1%)	35 (18.7%)	92 (49.2%)	
	Not Ready	1 (9.1%)	3 (27.3%)	7 (63.6%)	
	NA	2 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (33.3%)	
Developing People	Ready	160 (65.0%)	26 (10.6%)	60 (24.4%)	38.99 *p*<.001
	Somewhat Ready	73 (39.2%)	26 (14.0%)	87 (46.8%)	
	Not Ready	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	8 (72.7%)	
	NA	2 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (33.3%)	
Focusing on Learning	Ready	140 (57.4%)	31 (12.7%)	73 (29.9%)	44.06 *p*<.001
	Somewhat Ready	56 (30.1%)	28 (15.1%)	102 (54.8%)	
	Not Ready	0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)	9 (81.8%)	
	NA	2 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (33.3%)	
Improving Instruction	Ready	124 (50.6%)	31 (12.7%)	90 (36.7%)	43.63 *p*<.001
	Somewhat Ready	42 (23.1%)	26 (14.3%)	114 (62.6%)	
	Not Ready	0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)	9 (81.8%)	
	NA	2 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (33.3%)	

There were also relationships between perception of mentoring needs and the year the assistant principals completed their preservice program and the years of experience they had as assistant principals. Those who completed the preservice program before 2009 were more likely to report no needs in mentoring, while those who completed the program after 2009 were more likely to indicate they need mentoring (see Table 11). Assistant principals with five or more years of AP experience reported less mentoring needs than those with less than 5 years of experiences (see Table 12).

Table 11

Relationship Between Years of Completing Preservice Program and Perception of Mentoring Needs

Variable		When did you complete preservice program? <2009 n=352	When did you complete preservice program? After 2009 n=107	χ^2	*p*-value
Setting Direction	No Need	174 (50.9%)	39 (37.1%)	8.87	.012*
	Not Sure	53 (15.5%)	14 (13.3%)		
	Need	115 (33.6%)	52 (49.5%)		
Developing People	No Need	191 (56.0%)	46 (43.4%)	14.96	.001**
	Not Sure	47 (13.8%)	7 (6.6%)		
	Need	103 (30.2%)	53 (50.0%)		
Focusing on Learning	No Need	162 (47.6%)	37 (35.2%)	10.69	.005**
	Not Sure	51 (15.0%)	10 (9.5%)		
	Need	127 (37.4%)	58 (55.2%)		
Improving Instruction	No Need	141 (41.8%)	28 (26.7%)	16.72	<.001***
	Not Sure	51 (15.1%)	8 (7.6%)		
	Need	145 (43.0%)	69 (65.7%)		

Table 12

Relationship Between Years of Experiences as AP and Perception of Mentoring Needs

Mentoring Needs		Years of Experiences as an AP 1~4	Years of Experiences as an AP 5 or more	χ^2	*p*-value
Setting Direction	No Need	65 (36.9%)	148 (54.6%)	16.301	<.001***
	Not Sure	26 (14.8%)	41 (15.1%)		
	Need	85 (48.3%)	82 (30.3%)		
Developing	No Need	81 (45.8%)	156 (57.8%)	12.353	.002**

Mentoring Needs		Years of Experiences as an AP		χ^2	*p*-value
		1~4	5 or more		
People	Not Sure	17 (9.6%)	37 (13.7%)		
	Need	79 (44.6%)	77 (28.5%)		
Focusing on Learning	No Need	61 (34.7%)	138 (51.3%)		
	Not Sure	21 (11.9%)	40 (14.9%)	17.070	<.001***
	Need	94 (53.4%)	91 (33.8%)		
Improving Instruction	No Need	49 (28.3%)	120 (44.6%)		
	Not Sure	15 (8.7%)	44 (16.4%)	24.461	<.001***
	Need	109 (63.0%)	105 (39.0%)		

When asked where they received their mentoring most often, those assistant principals who reported ready or somewhat ready were more likely to participate in one-on-one mentoring and informal meetings among principals and assistant principals than those who reported they were not ready ($\chi^2_{(2)}$=7.85, *p*=.02, $\chi^2_{(2)}$=21.76, *p*<.001, respectively, see Table 13). About 64.9% of APs who participated in one-on-one mentoring reported it was effective to very effective, while about 72.4% of APs who participated in informal meetings report it was effective to very effective.

Table 13

Mentoring Opportunities and The Relationship with Perception of Readiness in Instructional Leadership

Activity	χ^2 (df=2)	*p*-value
District-assigned formal mentoring program	4.54	.10
District-sponsored professional development activities specifically for AP	1.57	.46
District-paid professional conferences or meetings where attendance is expected or required	4.08	.13
Programs provided by state administrator association such as CLAS, or the Regional Inservice Center	4.69	.10
One-on-one mentoring for instructional leadership by your current principal	7.85	.02*
Informal meetings among principals and assistant principals to discuss issues	21.76	<.001***
Formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by local university	2.81	.25

Formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by state agency	1.40	.50
Mentoring provided by experienced or senior administrators that you initiated	5.74	.06

Discussion

The results reported in this paper highlight the characteristics of the assistant principals who self-identified as "ready" as instructional leaders. A summary of the results is listed below, with comments accompanying each:

- 61% of the respondents had 5 or more years as an assistant principal; 12.4% had one year; 10.8% had two years; 7.4% had 3 years; 8% had 4 years. The number of assistant principals with more than five years of experience was somewhat of a surprise to us. This means that an older demographic constituted the majority of those who participated in the survey. It could also indicate that there are those who may be choosing to be career assistant principals, or at least staying longer in the position before moving up. However, 38% of those responding had 1 to 4 years experience, so there are a significant number of new assistant principals in Alabama.
- Years of experience as a teacher and the age of the assistant principal had no significance when it came to being ready to be an instructional leader. This is also somewhat of a surprise, as we might expect that those who were in the classroom longer would be more conversant with instructional leadership. That speculation did not bear out in the analysis.
- 77.3% of the assistant principals finished their preparation program prior to 2009 (under the old Alabama preparation programs). This indicates that over three-fourths of those taking the survey were trained in Educational Administration programs that more than likely did not have an instructional leadership focus now required.

- 70% attended preparation programs that were totally face to face; 27.4% attended hybrid face to face/online programs, and 2.2% attended totally online programs. This indicates that face to face programs are still the norm in educational leadership, but hybrid programs are gaining ground.
- Those graduating before 2009 reported being more ready than those who graduated after 2009. This was perhaps the result that gave us the most opportunity for speculation as to the reason why. This is discussed later in this section.
- Females reported being more ready than males (62.8% females; 48% males); those who had been K-2 teachers reported being more ready than any other teaching background. This is not so surprising, as there are more females in teaching in general, and primary teachers are well-versed in all aspects of curriculum and also usually employ the widest spectrum of instructional strategies in trying to reach all children.
- Teacher leadership activities were considered to contribute to readiness for instructional leadership. This would be logical, and we expected this result.
- The top five teacher leadership activities that assisted an assistant principal with readiness were: 1) facilitating professional development for other teachers; 2) chairing/being a member of a school committee; 3) chairing/being a member of a professional organization task force; 4) serving as an officer of a professional organization; 5) serving as a peer coach or mentor to a new teacher. These roles likely thrust the individuals into more intense leadership roles that would expose them to the “behind the scenes” aspects of building leadership and fostered familiarity with educational entities beyond the local building.

- 60% of respondents reported that their current role required 50% or more of their time to be spent on instructional leadership, and those participants reported as being ready or very ready to be instructional leaders. However, more than 60% of the respondents had no idea what percentage of their evaluation was based on their instructional leadership performance. This should be a cause for concern for local districts, as well as the Alabama State Board of Education.
- Those assistant principals with 5 or more years of experience were more likely to report no need of mentoring; those with 1 – 4 years of experience reported a need of mentoring, especially in the "improving instruction" domain from the definition of instructional leadership. This is compatible with the former statistic of the more experienced assistant principals reporting that they were more ready as instructional leaders. This is further discussed below.
- The most effective mentoring assistant principals received was not formal, but rather, came from informal meetings with the principal or other assistant principals to discuss issues; however, 47.8% of them reported that happened only 'occasionally.' This indicates that mentoring for assistant principals is not usually conducted in an intentional way, and is sporadic.
- Only those assistant principals working in large districts felt they did not need mentoring in 'Improving Instruction.' One could speculate that larger districts provide more professional development for all principals in the aspects of improving instruction.

The focus of all Alabama university educational leadership programs is now on preparing instructional leaders, following the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leadership which were adopted in 2007. The newest cohorts of instructional leaders graduated from Alabama

preparation programs after the redesign efforts which took place between 2007 and 2009. However, there are a great number of assistant principals in positions around the state who were trained under a more "management focus" of leadership. Both groups, those trained traditionally, and those trained with an instructional leadership focus, are assumed to now be evaluated by the same standards for instructional leadership that were adopted in 2007. However, in our study, we found that over 60% of the participants did not know if their instructional leadership competencies or behaviors were assessed in their current performance evaluation. In our opinion, this is disconcerting. If instructional leadership is now being emphasized as Job #1 by the Alabama State Department of Education, then administrator evaluation should align with those expectations. Individual school districts may have an aligned administrator evaluation system based on the instructional leadership standards, but in personal conversation with numerous school principals, we have found that districts are only using the formative assessment called LEADAlabama. Perhaps over 60% of our participants do not see LEADAlabama as an evaluation instrument or they may not be cognizant of the instructional focus that is imbedded in LEADAlabama. All of this will soon change, as the Alabama State Department of Education is redesigning the administrator performance evaluation at the time of this writing (Mark Kirkemeier, Alabama State Department of Education, personal communication). Principals will see instructional leadership as the centerpiece of that new document.

Implications

In this study, we sought to discover the profile of the ready assistant principal, as well as the mentoring needs of those who do not feel totally ready to be instructional leaders. We discovered some surprising differences in assistant principals who were trained and certified before the redesign of educational leadership programs and those who were trained and certified

after the redesign when it came to being ready to lead instruction. The most notable result was that those who graduated from preparation programs after the redesign mandate actually report themselves as less ready as instructional leaders than the veteran assistant principals who graduated before 2009. One speculation could be that the older graduates "don't know what they don't know" about instructional leadership, while the newer graduates are more acutely aware of the demands of that role due to their exposure to the current concepts of instructional leadership. They may see the gap between the ideal and the reality. They may know that they will have to continually be growing in their knowledge and skills to meet the standards of effectiveness in the role of instructional leader. Another possibility could be that the older assistant principals have "re-tooled" themselves through professional development and truly are performing in the role of instructional leader. This aspect of the results will need further investigation, as it was quite unexpected. Follow up interviews with these older assistant principals should be conducted to ascertain the reason for the confidence they feel in their instructional leadership abilities.

Another interesting finding in the study was that there are certain teacher leadership activities that were identified as being influential on an assistant principal's readiness as an instructional leader. Those roles were 1) facilitating professional development for other teachers; 2) chairing/being a member of a school committee; 3) chairing/being a member of a professional organization task force; 4) serving as an officer of a professional organization; and 5) serving as a peer coach or mentor to a new teacher. This particular finding confirms research by Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) in which they found that readiness to assume a building administrator role was enhanced when aspiring principals were given leadership opportunities as teachers. Those included being asked to serve on a school leadership team, serving as the principal designee in the absence of the principal, assisting teachers with professional development,

conducting teacher observations, disciplining students, and planning and conducting meetings. Thus, practicing principals, assistant principals, and central office administrators would be wise to foster teacher leadership in these specific roles in order to prepare potential candidates for future school administrative positions. As Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) emphasized:

> Clearly, schools and districts need to determine their leadership needs, recruit people who will make strong administrators, and provide them with opportunities to learn about and take on administrative tasks to help them see whether they can, or want to, contribute at this level, thereby facilitating their commitment to administrative practice. (p. 485)

The final observation we would like to make from this study pertains to the mentoring of assistant principals. Although there is a mandate in Alabama to mentor all new senior principals (Alabama State Department of Education, 2011), there is nothing in place for assistant principals. Our study participants who were the older ones who had graduated from their preparation programs before 2009 indicated they had no mentoring needs when it came to being ready as instructional leaders. But at the same time, when asked where they received their mentoring most often, those assistant principals who reported ready or somewhat ready were more likely to state that they participated in one-on-one mentoring and informal meetings among principals and assistant principals than those who reported they were not ready ($\chi^2_{(2)}=7.85$, $p=.02$, $\chi^2_{(2)}=21.76$, $p<.001$, respectively, see Table 13). About 64.9% of assistant principals who participated in one-on-one mentoring reported it was effective to very effective, while about 72.4% of assistant principals who participated in informal meetings reported it was effective to very effective. If we combine these findings, it would appear that even though the older assistant principals reported no need for mentoring now, they had received it in the past, and when they did, it was informal and came from impromptu conversations with their colleagues, and they deemed it to be

effective to very effective. On the other hand, assistant principals who self-reported somewhat ready and not ready at all (n=200) as instructional leaders, indicated that they need mentoring in the following areas (rank ordered): improving the instructional program (n=123, 61.5%), focusing on learning (n=111, 55.5%), setting direction (n=99, 49.5%), and developing people (n=95, 47.5%). Notice that the number of assistant principals who judged themselves as somewhat ready or not ready was 200, and that is the number who are awaiting mentoring experiences that will assist them in becoming better instructional leaders. Should we leave their mentoring to chance? Should we hope that their senior principals or more experienced assistant principal colleagues are mentoring them in an intentional way?

This finding has implications for groups that could respond to this need. First of all, educational leadership preparation faculty should discuss ways to bridge the gap between program completion and the new role of assistant principal for those candidates exiting their programs. Perhaps organized faculty mentoring groups for graduates who are aspiring to be assistant principals could be established. The Alabama Regional Inservice Centers could also conduct regular peer mentoring meetings for newly hired assistant principals, giving them an opportunity to learn from each other as they share challenges they have in common. The state principals' association, CLAS, could offer ongoing professional development, as well as a formal mentoring program for new assistant principals. If we want all assistant principals to be instructional leaders in that role, we need to scaffold the learning for them with multiple opportunities for them to acquire the competencies needed to lead the instructional program in their schools.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study was a large state study with over half of the state's assistant principals responding to the survey, it is not without limitations. One limitation is that there was no way to control the experience level of the respondents. Therefore, the responses were somewhat skewed in the direction of principals who had more than 5 years of experience, as there were more of them who responded than those who had less than 5 years of experience. Another limitation is that the surveys came from participants in all parts of the state, but they were not evenly distributed from all regions. A final limitation pertains to what is reported in this paper. We chose to select only certain question responses from the large survey to answer two of our research subquestions. We also did not report any of the responses to the open-ended comments sections that accompanied some of these questions, but only the statistical analysis. Therefore, there could be additional information, not reported, that could shed light on these two research questions. Additional data from this survey, including data from the open-ended responses, will be reported in forthcoming papers.

Closing Reflections

As Educational Leadership professors, we care deeply about the preparation of quality, qualified, knowledgeable instructional leaders for K-12 schools. Almost exclusively, our graduating students will enter school administration at the assistant principal level. We hold the assumption that they know instructional leadership should be their main focus. However, we legitimately wonder if they will have the opportunity in the role of assistant principal to enact their skills in this domain, as we fear they are often relegated to the 3 B's (buses, buildings, books). The demand of accountability for student achievement in schools is now being extended to include every formal leader and every teacher. Ready or not, assistant principals will be

evaluated on their instructional leadership behaviors. Our hope is that the results of our study, reported in this paper, will cause us all to reflect on how we can contribute to helping our graduates be READY assistant principals in all the domains of instructional leadership.

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