

St. John's University

St. John's Scholar

Theses and Dissertations

2021

PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENABLING AND HINDERING BEHAVIORS, RULES, AND STRUCTURES IN NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Matthew W. Darby

Saint John's University, Jamaica New York

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.stjohns.edu/theses_dissertations



Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), and the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Darby, Matthew W., "PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENABLING AND HINDERING BEHAVIORS, RULES, AND STRUCTURES IN NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS" (2021). *Theses and Dissertations*. 211. https://scholar.stjohns.edu/theses_dissertations/211

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by St. John's Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of St. John's Scholar. For more information, please contact fazzinol@stjohns.edu.

PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS
OF ENABLING AND HINDERING BEHAVIORS, RULES, AND STRUCTURES
IN NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Matthew Darby

Date Submitted: May 12, 2021

Date Approved: May 19 2021

Matthew Darby

Barbara Cozza

©Copyright by Matthew Darby 2021

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENABLING AND HINDERING BEHAVIORS, RULES, AND STRUCTURES IN NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Matthew Darby

There has been increasing recognition among researchers and practitioners that the demands of the principalship have become unsustainable. School districts play a pivotal role in supporting school leaders in the execution of their responsibilities. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to further uncover how school district bureaucracies enable and hinder the work of principals.

In the quantitative phase of the study the researcher analyzed survey responses from 244 New York State principals to determine the extent to which district structures were perceived as hindering or enabling their work. In the qualitative phase, the researcher interviewed two principals, one who described their district as enabling and one who described their district as hindering. The researcher analyzed interview transcripts using two cycles of coding to first identify hindering and enabling structures of the district bureaucracy, and then examine how the identified behaviors, rules, and structures hindered or enabled the work of school leaders.

The perceptions by principals of enabling and hindering behaviors, rules, and structures were the basis for creating prototypes of enabling and hindering district practices.

DEDICATION

While some will view the completion of this dissertation and the conferring of the Educational Doctorate as an indication of my intelligence, I know I am the product of far more intelligent people who lacked the educational opportunities, resources and support I have been afforded. I view the conferral of this degree as a formal recognition of my curiosity, a characteristic I shared with my grandmothers.

The inquisitive mind of my paternal grandmother, Charlotte Darby, sustained her through challenges encountered while growing up in rural poverty. Like so many women of the time, her education was often interrupted to care for younger siblings or sick family members when the need arose. Despite the numerous obstacles rural poverty presented, her curious nature persisted. My grandmother's desire to learn was reflected in her skill set. To know her, was to know a farmer, gardener, carpenter, electrician, seamstress, and painter. It was an impressive resumé for anyone, let alone a woman coming of age in 1930's and 1940's

My maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Williams, raised in the Bronx, shared a similar appetite for information. With no formal education beyond a high school diploma, her keen interest in the stock market grew my grandfather's meager firefighter's salary into investments and holdings that provided for 5 daughters, numerous family vacations, and financial support for the education of their 10 grandchildren. With no professional guidance or lessons on financial markets and investing, it was her thirst for knowledge and desire to improve her family's lot in life that motivated her to learn.

I am fortunate to have known such intelligent, strong-willed, and motivated women as my grandmothers. I find inspiration in my memories of them, and so it is to Charlotte Darby (Grandma) and Elizabeth Williams (Maw) that I dedicate this dissertation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I chose education as my career, earning my doctorate had always been on my list of professional goals. Finally, after spending 9 out of the last 10 years in countless night and weekend classes as a student in various graduate programs earning master degrees and professional certifications, my goal is now my reality.

There have been so many people who have encouraged me on this journey; colleagues have given advice, friends and classmates have sustained me through kindness and laughter, and my family has loved and supported me unconditionally. Writing this dissertation has been a great life experience. I am a better person, educator, and leader because I have learned, reflected, and persevered.

I would first like to thank Dr. Barbara Cozza, my dissertation chair for her guidance and calm approach to the dissertation process. I would also extend my appreciation to the dissertation committee members, Dr. Erin Fahle and Dr. Rosalba DelVecchio, whose feedback and resources strengthened my work.

I am extremely indebted to my parents, Donna and Tom Darby. They have believed in me my entire life; they have never doubted that I would be successful in achieving whatever goals I set for myself. I live my life firm in the belief that I will be successful in my pursuits because of the positive self-image and confidence nurtured by my parents' love. As an educator I realize how precious that is, and I am forever thankful.

Thanks should also go to my siblings, Heather, Tom and Kayce. You probably never realized it, but your small gestures of support, questions about my research, and quick check-ins on my progress, often helped refocus my efforts. When I questioned my

commitment to the process, you three never had any doubts about my success. Your faith in me was often motivation to continue forward.

Finally, I am very thankful for the love and support of my wife Kristin. When I began the doctoral program at St. John's University you were a close friend. As I progressed through the program you became my girlfriend, fiancé, and then finally, two weeks before I defended my research, you became my wife. Thank you for your love and encouragement during this process. This journey would have been much more stressful without your willingness to plan our wedding and navigate our lives through a pandemic while I was locked away in a bedroom or dining room writing. I appreciate your understanding, comfort, and encouragement. I am humbled by your unconditional love and support. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Theoretical Framework.....	4
Significance of the Study.....	6
Connection with Vincentian Mission in Education.....	7
Research Questions	8
Definition of Terms	8
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH.....	11
Theoretical Framework.....	11
Related Research	19
CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES	39
Research Questions	39
Mixed Method Design	40
Quantitative Study.....	42
Qualitative Study.....	57

Summary.....	83
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	85
Introduction.....	85
Results.....	86
Qualitative Findings	97
Summary.....	139
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	141
Implications of the Findings	141
Relationship to Prior Research.....	154
Limitations of the Study	162
Recommendations for Future Practice	165
Prototypes	167
Recommendations for Future Research.....	174
Final Thoughts	175
APPENDIX A.....	177
APPENDIX B.....	178
APPENDIX C.....	181
APPENDIX D.....	183
APPENDIX E	184
APPENDIX F.....	186

APPENDIX G.....	188
APPENDIX H.....	196
REFERENCES.....	206

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: <i>Description of EDS Survey Participants' Demographics</i>	50
Table 2: <i>Description of EDS Survey Participants' School Settings</i>	51
Table 3: <i>Codebook for Enabling District Structure Survey</i>	53
Table 4: <i>Description of Interview Participants' Demographics and School Setting</i>	59
Table 5: <i>Principal Responses to Enabling District Structure Form</i>	61
Table 6: <i>Descriptive Statistics of the EDS Survey Data</i>	88
Table 7: <i>Principal identified hindering and enabling district practices</i>	98
Table 8: <i>Hindering district practices and their influence on the school principal</i>	122
Table 9: <i>Enabling district behaviors and their influence on the school principal</i>	131

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: <i>Composite ratings of principal responses to the EDS survey</i>	87
---	----

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, researchers and policymakers have established the important role principals play in school improvement initiatives (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013). Whether it is through raising student achievement (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010); enhancing school climate (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012); improving working conditions (Ladd, 2011) or reducing teacher turnover (Hirsch, Freitas, Church, & Villar, 2008); the benefits of a quality, school principal are numerous. Initial efforts to improve principal effectiveness centered on the individual (Harvey & Holland, 2011); however, within the last decade there has been greater recognition that the principal alone cannot lead sustainable school improvement efforts, and that enabling district conditions and supports are necessary components for principals to be effective in their role (Mitgang, 2013).

Across the United States, school districts have been partnering with their students' families and communities to support school improvement efforts and student success (Sanders, 2001). School principals are at the center of accomplishing these achievements. However, district practices are considered by some principals to be either a source of hindrances or support. Principals at improving schools typically felt they had a cooperative working association with the district staff. They gave a much more extensive portrayal of district policies and practices that supported their work and enhanced student achievement (Zepeda & Ponticell, 2018). On the contrary, principals in schools that showed limited improvement claimed that district structures were to blame for centralizing most improvement strategies. Principals have encountered district practices that seem more focused on compliance than about enabling and establishing the capacity

of principals to be meaningful actors in school reforms (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010).

Many school principals feel that there is minimal support from their district. They argue that the strategies central offices implement often circumvent them on instructional and curriculum matters. The common objectives motivating district decisions, as perceived by principals, are linked to enhancing student performance on state assessments and having a more significant proportion of them meeting accountability aims as necessitated by law. Most of the time, the focus of the district is on learners achieving minimum criteria and not improving success for all student groups or generating well-prepared students for postsecondary learning. Often, district policies reflect an educational management philosophy, not an educational leadership approach. Districts that simply manage, fail to have significant improvement in their schools and usually lack a cohesive development program. Such a program would be comprised of clear objectives, practices based on research, supportive policies, and accountability measures that are focused on improvement (Whitehead, Boschee & Decker, 2012). As an alternative, they are characterized by actions that are incoherent. Principals perceived these types of programs as disjointed, rather than a well-planned arrangement of improvement initiatives (Whitehead, Boschee & Decker, 2012). A majority of the principals were not engaged in outlining instructional matters prevalent in their schools or in creating feasible resolutions. Instead, these resolutions are processed by the district personnel. Principals possess little control of issues and minimal support or inspiration to find resolutions.

Research shows that district structures need to change to work in collaboration with school principals (Ylimaki, 2014). Districts need to transform from being overseers and holding school leaders answerable for matters they have little input over and begin offering capacity-building measures that true district-school relationships need. District practices should empower principals to be leaders of change.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to 1) examine the extent to which district structures were perceived as hindering or enabling by principals, 2) identify hindering and enabling behaviors, rules, and structures of the district bureaucracy, and 3) examine how the identified behaviors, rules, and structures hindered or enabled the work of school principals. Through surveys, and interviews, principals gave detailed descriptions of behaviors, rules, and structures that hindered and enabled their progress toward school improvement.

Often, bureaucrats are not fully aware of the impact of their actions, and how their actions are perceived by clients and others outside the bureaucracy (Sinden, 2002). The identification of hindering and enabling behaviors, rules, and structures generated a preliminary list of practices that could be used to inform superintendents and district staff about which practices interfered with the work of their principals and which supported their work. A framework of practices that described hindering and enabling behaviors, rules, and structures would allow administrators to examine their actions to see if they are contained within the framework. This framework would also help district leaders reflect upon their current behaviors and policies and establish new policies that reduce

bureaucratic dysfunction and expand upon the practices identified as enabling the work of principals.

The study built on recent research into how school districts could better support the work of their principals. It addressed a paucity of research into this topic as it relates to the New York State school system. This research extended the work of Hoy and Sweetland (2001) and their findings around enabling and hindering schools. Hoy and Sweetland applied bureaucratic theory to the school building and developed an instrument to determine the enabling and hindering nature of the organization based on teacher perception. This study applied Hoy and Sweetland's theoretical framework to the school district and used a modified version of the instrument to measure the enabling and hindering nature of the school district as perceived by principals.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this research is rooted in Max Weber's theory of Bureaucracy. His theory is related to the structure and administrative processes of an organization. Weber (1947) believed that the bureaucratic structure of management is necessary for attaining the highest degree of efficiency possible. Scott and Davis (2015) define the bureaucracy as a specialized administrative staff whose function is to service and maintain the organization itself. Two of the most salient elements of bureaucracies, according Hoy and Sweetland, (2001) are centralization and formalization. Centralization is the structuring of an organization into a hierarchy, and formalization is the creation of clearly defined rules to help govern the organization and its members. All modern organizations have these two essential elements of the bureaucracy present (Göksoy, 2015).

When designed appropriately, organizational leaders can utilize bureaucratic structures to provide guidance and support to employees (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Sinden, 2002). While bureaucracies are not inherently positive or negative in the impact on an organization and its members, researchers have shown that bureaucracies can have a positive influence on employees and organizations by increasing employee satisfaction, enhancing innovation, reducing role conflict, and decreasing alienation. Depending on its design and functionality, a bureaucracy can enable or hinder its members from completing their tasks and reaching organizational goals.

Enabling structures within a bureaucracy are those that help employees achieve the purpose of the organization while hindering structures are those that prevent or impede employees from achieving the purpose of the organization. Hoy and Sweetland (2001) embraced the concept of enabling and hindering bureaucratic structures because schools require bureaucratic structures with rules and authority structures to maintain stability and enhance effectiveness. Initially, Hoy and Sweetland conceptualized and described formalization and centralization as two independent factors, but their research on schools demonstrated that “formalization and centralization covaried together and formed one bi-polar factor with enabling at one extreme and hindering at the other” (Sinden, Hoy, & Sweetland, 2004, p. 465). When the school hierarchy is enabling or hindering so too are the rules and procedures. Therefore, carefully designing hierarchies, and promoting enabling structures can help reduce bureaucratic dysfunction in schools (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001).

Further research conducted with Sinden (2004) identified characteristics that distinguished enabling and hindering schools. According to Landy (2013), Hoy and

Sweetland argued that the creation of enabling school structures should focus on structural components of the school that empowered and freed the professional expertise of teachers. Although specific to teachers, this finding aligns with research conducted at the district level focusing on principals (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). Bottoms and Fry interviewed principals from various schools focusing on their relationship with the district. Principals from the most-improved schools described their district as supportive while principals from the least-improved schools described their districts as unconcerned with their development (2009). This research is indicative of the considerable influence that organizational context bears on its members. Moreover, these findings suggest that the same, or similar organizational influence school structures have on teachers may be observed in the structures of school districts and their influence on principals.

The researcher used the theoretical framework described above to analyze principals' perceptions of enabling and hindering bureaucratic structures found in New York State (NYS) school districts. The research and findings of Hoy and Sweetland formed the foundation for the principal perception survey that measured the extent to which certain components of the school district enabled and/or hindered their professional work.

Significance of the Study

The significance of focusing on the principal is found in extant literature that reveals how the principal is integral in creating a school environment that fosters academic achievement (Farley, 2019). Moreover, Sinden's research (2002) has established that teachers can differentiate between behaviors, rules, and structures at the school level that are enabling and hindering their work. Where Sinden's findings

provided school administrators a framework of teacher enabling school practices, the district behaviors, rules, and structures identified through this research serve as a starting point or guideline for district administrators who wish to test its usefulness. Although there may not be consensus surrounding the identified behaviors, rules, and structures as hindering or enabling, general agreements can serve as best practices for the district's administrators.

The identification of enabling and hindering practices in schools has been well established in the current literature (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000, 2001; Jacob, 2004; Sinden, 2002; Sinden et al., 2004; Watts, 2009). By providing information to district offices about best practices for enabling the work of school principals, this study helped further support the implementation of initiatives aimed at improving the education of all students.

The researcher extended the theoretical framework established by Hoy and Sweetland at the school level and applied it to the district level. Few studies have examined the school district through the lens of Hoy and Sweetland's framework of bureaucratic theory (Kotnis, 2004; Landy, 2013), and none have done so with the goal of identifying hindering and enabling practices. By analyzing principals' perceptions of district support, the growing body of research aimed at further understanding the district-principal relationship is bolstered with the addition of the findings from this study.

Connection with Vincentian Mission in Education

Inspired by the Vincentian tradition, St. John's University writes in its mission statement that it strives to "provide an excellent education for all people, especially those lacking economic, physical, or social advantages," and that wherever possible, the university "devotes its intellectual and physical resources to search out the causes of

poverty and social injustice and encourages solutions that are adaptable, effective, and concrete” (“St. John's University," 2020). The study directly aligned with the mission of St. John’s University and the Vincentian philosophy. By identifying the hindering and enabling practices of school districts, the study provided district offices with guidance on how better support principals so that they may enact initiatives and policies meant to improve student outcomes across all demographics and socio-economic statuses.

Research Questions

- 1) To what extent are district bureaucracies perceived as hindering or enabling by principals?
- 2) What behaviors, rules, and structures can be identified and described by principals as hindering as opposed to enabling?
- 3) How do hindering and enabling behaviors, rules, and structures of a district influence the work of school principals?

Definition of Terms

Bureaucracy. Scott and Davis (2015) defined bureaucracy as a specialized administrative staff whose function is to service and maintain the organization itself. In this study, the researcher was concerned with district bureaucracies and included both line and staff administrators. Line administrators are superintendents, deputy superintendents, and others at the district level who carry out policy and make administrative decisions. Staff administrators in the local school districts refer to the individuals who deal with areas such as curriculum, pupil personnel, certificated and noncertificated personnel, grounds, transportation, food services, grants, finance, and other auxiliary services.

Centralization. Centralization refers to the role of employees in the decision-making process. High centralization concentrates most of the decision making at the top of the organization; whereas, low centralization diffuses decision making across many employees (Sinden et al., 2004). In this study, centralization referred to the level of autonomy school districts allowed principals when making organizational decisions. Hindering centralization is an administrative district hierarchy that impedes principal problem solving and enabling centralization is a district hierarchy that helps principals solve problems.

Enabling Structure. Enabling structures are designed with procedures that help employees deal more effectively with contingencies (Adler & Borys, 1996). In this study, enabling structure meant that the school principals had access to the materials and services needed for them to be effective in performing their roles and responsibilities.

Formalization. Formalization is the extent of a codified system of rules, regulations, and procedures found in an organization (Sinden et al., 2004). An organization with high formalization is characterized by numerous rules, regulations and guidelines that must be followed (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). Low formalization in organizations allows for individuals to use their professional discretion for decision making and problem solving.

Hierarchy. Hierarchy is the organization of bureaucrats where each level is subordinate to the ascendant (Weber, 1947). In the context of the school and school district setting there is a vertical hierarchy. In the NYS school districts the hierarchy begins with the board of education and superintendent and extends down through line administrators to teachers, secretaries, custodians, and other staff.

Hindering Structure. The concept of the hindering structure originates from the ideas of coercive formalization defined by Adler and Borys (1996). When organizations force employees to conform to the procedures and rules, this is viewed as coercive formalization (Adler & Borys, 1996). Coercive formalization is one component of a hindering bureaucracy (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). In this study, hindering means that the school district administrators are preventing or impeding the work of the principals in pursuit of their organizational goals.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

A literature review is a summary of journal articles, books and other documents that describe the past and current state of information on a particular research topic (Creswell, 2012). In general, the literature review can take several forms. Cooper (2015) discussed four types of literature reviews. A literature review can incorporate other researchers' findings, connect related topics, criticize published academic works, or identify the important issues in a field. In the following literature review the researcher further expands upon the theoretical framework introduced in chapter one and then conducts an article-by-article analysis building bridges between related topics. The researcher uses this structure to move from the larger problem in the field to the narrower issue that will be studied. By connecting the related topics, the researcher justified the importance of the research problem and provides a rationale for the purpose of the study. At the end of the chapter the researcher summarizes the research that was reviewed and discusses the importance of the study as it relates to the larger ongoing dialogue in the literature, and how the proposed study will fill in gaps and extend prior studies.

Theoretical Framework

According to Max Weber, the bureaucratic structure of an organization is necessary for attaining the highest degree of efficiency possible (1947). Yet, in society there is a commonly held perception that bureaucracies are unresponsive and inefficient. Research, however, identifies two opposing sets of findings one negative, but the other positive (Adler & Borys, 1996; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). The negative findings reveal bureaucratic structures that alienate, growing dissatisfaction, deter creativity, and discourage employees. The contrasting view finds organizational structures that guide

conduct, clarify duties, decrease stress, and empower employees to be more successful (Adler & Borys, 1996; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Sinden, 2002). When redesigning bureaucracies, the goal is to create structures that create positive outcomes while avoiding negative ones.

Adler and Borys (1996) sought to reconcile these contradictory assessments of core bureaucratic elements. Their research focused on workflow formalization. Adler and Borys' analysis of previous research into the design of equipment technology provided the framework they would use to theorize about formalization. They found apparent connections between the debates around the use of automation in the technology sector and the conflicting views toward formalization in bureaucracies.

For example, Adler and Borys (1996) found there are two basic perceptions regarding the use of automation in organizations. One approach views automation as the deskilling and degradation of work, and the other perceives it to be upgrading and enriching. An important distinction emerged from the discussion of automation. How organizations design their automated systems reflects how they view their employees and customers. Equipment can be designed with the rationale to fool proof and deskill work to reduce the reliance on highly skilled employees. On the other hand, equipment may upgrade and enhance the employee's capabilities by leveraging their intelligence and expertise. The two design rationales reflect two very different philosophies regarding users. For example, one sees the user as a source of problems to be eliminated while the other sees the user as a source of skill and intelligence to be supported. Consequently, Adler and Borys (1996) found strong parallels between workplace automation and bureaucratic formalization.

Adler and Borys (1996) theorized that formalization in organizations is designed with similar underlying rationales regarding employees. Formal procedures can be written to fool proof the work process or they can be designed to enable employees to leverage their experience and expertise. In the “enabling type of formalization,” (Adler & Borys, 1996, p. 69) the written rules and procedures incorporate lessons learned from past experiences. This approach to formalization creates stability and builds best practices into the work of employees. By contrast, Adler and Borys also described a “coercive type of formalization” (1996, p. 69) with procedures designed to force compliance and compel effort.

Distinguishing between enabling and coercive formalization in an organization has benefits. Adler and Borys (1996) hypothesized employees would differentiate between good and bad procedures based on their experience. Good and bad procedures would be characterized by certain features employees identify as helpful or harmful to their work. Organizations can continue to have employees adhere to these procedures if beneficial or change the formalized policies if coercive. Despite specifically focusing on formalization, Adler and Borys (1996) posited that the enabling and coercive typology applies to other aspects of the bureaucracy.

The framework established by Adler and Borys (1996) has important implications for bureaucratic theory. The rationale behind its design determines employees’ perceptions of formalization as positive or negative. Employees perceive formalization in a positive manner if it enables them to master their tasks better. They perceive formalization negatively if the rules are designed to aid management in coercing employees' effort and compliance.

Adler and Borys (1996) extended these findings to theorize that organizational bureaucracy can be conceptualized as a continuum between coercive and supportive. An enabling bureaucracy contains flexibly and dynamically built rules to enhance the effectiveness of people. Organizations create coercive bureaucracies to punish violations and require compliance and adherence to specific standards. These two characterizations suggest, that the rules, policies and structures adopted by an organization meaningfully impact the firm and those working within the system's constraints. Hoy and Sweetland (2001) start with this theoretical framework to build a conceptual model for analyzing bureaucratic properties in schools.

By definition, all formal organizations are characterized by two fundamental features of bureaucracy: centralization and formalization. All organizations have administrative decision making and are therefore centralized. Similarly, organizations are formalized with written rules and regulations. Schools are organizations with structure, hierarchy, and formalization. They are bureaucracies that positively and negatively influence the work of faculty, staff, and students. Hoy and Sweetland (2001) examined school bureaucracies in an attempt to reconcile the two opposing perspectives of bureaucracy as either alienating or facilitative.

Formalization

Hoy and Sweetland (2001) defined formalization as the degree to which the school has practices, written rules, and guidelines. Similar to Adler and Borys (1996), Hoy and Sweetland (2001) conceptualized formalization in schools as being enabling or hindering in nature. In organizations, hindering formalization often produces disaffection at the expense of commitment. Hindering rules and procedures penalize subordinates

instead of rewarding effective practices. Hindering formalization is negatively associated with job satisfaction and innovation. Expectedly, school formalization is typically related to negative consequences (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). Due to the dynamic nature of teaching, rules that try to foolproof the work tend to become more restrictive.

Enabling formalization facilitates employee innovation and problem solving. Enabling rules and procedures act as guidelines that reflect best practices and help subordinates effectively manage unfamiliar situations. Supportive procedures invite interactive dialogue and facilitate problem-solving. Enabling strategies require participation and collaboration. Hoy and Sweetland (2001) theorized that the negative consequences of formalization in school were not inherent in rules themselves but instead due to the manner in which administrators went about establishing rules and procedures.

Centralization

Centralization of authority is the degree to which employees participate in decision making in an organization. High centralization means that decisions are concentrated at the top of the organizational hierarchy, whereas low centralization indicates that employees share the decision-making authority. High centralization often is coercive. A centralized hierarchy is designed to guarantee disciplined compliance. Hoy and Sweetland (2001) extended the typology of enabling and hindering to characterize centralization.

In organizations with hindering centralization, the hierarchy and administration obstruct the work of subordinates instead of supporting its members with resolving problems. In such structures, the administration impedes employee innovation, and leaders use their power and authority to coerce and punish teachers. In schools where

administrators control professional work in a top-down fashion, faculty and staff are often resistant to such an approach (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). An organization's hierarchy provides the necessary guidance, management, and compliance. However, members tend to react negatively when management acts unilaterally to exercise control (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001).

Enabling centralization helps employees solve problems rather than obstructing their work. Organizations can structure authority to help superiors and subordinates work together across recognized boundaries. Hoy and Sweetland (2001) conceptualized of enabling centralization in schools as dynamic and cooperative rather than inflexible and coercive. Principals would use their power and authority to facilitate instruction by designing organizational structures to support faculty with teaching and learning.

Hoy and Sweetland (2000) applied the concepts of enabling and hindering centralization and formalization to the school bureaucracy. They tested a new construct called enabling school structure (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). An enabling school structure builds upon the idea that a school's hierarchy and system of rules and regulations can help the faculty and staff achieve the organization's goals. Hoy and Miskel (2008) define an enabling school structure as a hierarchy that enables the work of the teacher and a system of rules and regulations that guides problem-solving. In schools with enabling structures, teachers and leaders practice shared decision making while working cooperatively to resolve issues. In contrast, school structures are hindering when they are more tightly controlled or managed by the principal (Hoy, 2002).

Hindering school structure contains a system of rules and regulations that is coercive, and a hierarchy that inhibits the work of teachers. The underlying philosophy in

the design of a bureaucracy with hindering structures is that teacher behavior must be carefully managed and strictly controlled. School districts design hierarchies to elicit disciplined compliance from teachers. Disciplined compliance is achieved through the use of a formal hierarchy and rules to gain conformity. Under such bureaucracies, schools do not treat the teacher as a trusted professional, but as a subordinate who should do what administrators prescribe (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). In these structures the power of the principal is enhanced, but the work of the teachers is diminished.

Hoy and Sweetland (2001) designed a study to create valid and reliable measures for enabling formalization and enabling centralization. They generated a twenty-four item 5-point Likert scale survey for testing with teachers currently teaching in the public schools of Ohio. When responses were analyzed the 24 items used to measure enabling formalization and enabling centralization combined to form a single scale, a measure of enabling bureaucracy (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). School bureaucracy varied along a single continuum, an enabling bureaucracy at one extreme and a hindering bureaucracy at the other. The findings from this study are important to the current study for two reasons. First, it establishes the concept of a bipolar continuum through which school bureaucracies can be understood. Second, the study provides the foundation for an instrument to measure the enabling and hindering nature of school organizations.

Sinden's (2002) research continued the work of Hoy and Sweetland (2000), he examined the enabling bureaucratic behaviors and structures found in schools. Sinden (2002) centered his study on identifying the enabling, and hindering behaviors, rules and structures of the school bureaucracy, as well as the enabling and hindering behaviors of individual administrators and staff who comprise the bureaucracy. In total, 27 teachers

from schools that scored high on the “Enabling” scale participated in the research. Through interviews and surveys, teachers gave detailed descriptions of behaviors, rules, and structures that helped them complete their educational goals and of those behaviors, rules, and structures that hindered their work. For triangulation purposes, the results of the interviews were supplemented by observations of faculty meetings and by analysis of school documents that dealt with bureaucratic structure and behavior. Sinden (2002) concludes that rules, behaviors, and structures of school administrations and administrators do make a difference in whether the staff is enabled or hindered in doing their jobs. Sinden’s work is important to the current research because it will act as a model for how the proposed study will investigate a district’s structures, behaviors, and practices.

The previous research of Adler and Borys (1996), Hoy and Sweetland (2000, 2001) and Sinden (2002) form the basis of the theoretical framework for this study. Similar to Adler and Borys (1996), research posits that school districts design their bureaucracies to reflect their underlying philosophy toward school building principals. These bureaucracies can be enabling and coercive in nature. Districts that value the professional judgment and expertise of the school principal will design bureaucracies that support their work. Districts that do not trust the professional expertise of the principal will design a bureaucracy that exerts greater control and will create coercive environments meant to restrain principal autonomy.

Sinden, Hoy and Sweetland (2004) theorized that formalization and centralization in schools can be hindering and enabling in nature. School improvement requires a structure that enables faculty to do their jobs more creatively, and professionally (Hoy &

Sweetland, 2001; Sinden et al., 2004). In this study, the researcher asserted that school districts have formalization and centralization, and that these elements can be hindering or enabling in design. Similarly, for principals to succeed in school improvement, enabling district structures must be present.

Hoy, Sweetland (2001), and Sinden (2004) found that the enabling and hindering nature of school bureaucracies influences the work of teachers. I hypothesize that enabling districts positively influence the work of the principal and hindering districts negatively influence their work. Studying the district bureaucracy through this framework emphasizes the importance of its role in supporting the school building principal. It encourages district personnel to consider if their bureaucratic rules and procedures are designed in a manner that values the talents and expertise of their principals or merely forces their compliance. A review of the related literature illustrates just how important the principal is to school improvement and why districts need to consider how their bureaucratic structures influence the work of the school building leader.

Related Research

Importance of School Principals

In the current era of high-stakes testing, increased accountability, and heightened expectations, there has been growing recognition by educators, researchers, and policy makers about the indispensable role of the school principal in educational reform efforts. Because of their broad influence in school settings, a principal can impact the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of students across the school year. Several studies have found a significant link between student performance and school leadership.

Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) conducted a comprehensive study on school leadership and found evidence that school principals have a statistically significant effect on student achievement. While this wide-ranging study investigated several aspects of school leadership, one focus, relevant to the current study, examined how successful leadership practices directly and indirectly influence the quality of teaching and learning. Data for this research were collected over the course of six years from a wide range of respondents in nine states, 43 school districts, and 180 elementary, middle, and secondary schools.

The study, “Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning,” used survey instruments and interviews with teachers and administrators to collect the information. Surveys of teachers, administrators, and district personnel occurred at regular intervals over the five-year duration of the project. At the end of the project, the study recorded survey data from a total of 8,391 teachers and 471 school administrators as well as interview data from 581 teachers and administrators. Additionally, student achievement data was collected using scores from state test results in ELA and mathematics.

While using multiple methods in the analysis, Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) generally looked to discover significant patterns and relationships in the quantitative evidence, and then investigate these patterns in greater depth through qualitative research. The major finding from this research, as it relates to the proposed study, is that school leaders impact student achievement by influencing teachers’ motivation and working conditions. While their influence is indirect, the importance of this impact cannot be understated, the researchers could, “not [find] a single case of a

school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership” (Wahlstrom et al., 2010, p. 9) . This study is important in reaffirming the essential role played by principals in improving student achievement.

In another study, Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) examined key organizational factors to understand the influence of principal leadership on student achievement and classroom instruction. Sebastian and Allensworth collected student achievement data from the Chicago public school system as well as teacher responses to the biennial Consortium on Chicago School Research survey. Sebastian and Allensworth’s (2012) analysis included data from a total of 3,529 teachers from 99 high schools.

The study, “The Influence of Principal Leadership on Classroom Instruction and Student Learning,” examined the associations among classroom instruction, principal leadership, school organizational structures and student grades and test gains (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). The research found the school learning climate as the primary mechanism for improving student achievement, and that the school principal is critical in establishing the learning climate for the organization. Variations in school climate yielded classes with more rigorous academics, and better student behavior. These conditions led to an increase in student test scores and higher classroom grades (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). The research of Sebastian & Allensworth (2012), along with the findings of Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson (2010), draw similar conclusions of the significant influence of school principals on student achievement.

Further supporting the role principals play in improving student achievement are the findings from a study analyzing the effects of principal turnover on school outcomes. In their study, Be’teille, Kalogride, & Loeb utilized data from a large urban school

district to examine patterns of principal turnover, analyze the relationship between principal turnover with teacher turnover and student achievement, and describe the variation in the relationship between principal turnover and student achievement (2012). The findings from the study showed principal turnover tended to be detrimental to school performance. Moreover, when a school experienced frequent turnover in leadership it often resulted in lower teacher retention and lower student achievement gains. Notably, the study found that leadership changes were particularly harmful for low-achieving schools, high poverty schools and schools with many inexperienced teachers. Compounding the challenge, it was found that such schools not only faced high rates of principal turnover, but also struggled to attract experienced replacements (Béteille et al., 2012).

Although limited to the Miami-Dade school district, the findings support the assertion in the current research that the principal position is of vital importance to school improvement and student achievement gains, and that research into enabling the work of the position is worthy of study.

Where Béteille, Kalogride, & Loeb (2012), established the negative effect principal turnover can have on a school and student outcomes, Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin (2012) sought to estimate an individual principals' contributions to growth in student achievement. The researchers approached the issue using the "value-added" method, which was similar to studies that measured a teacher's impact on student achievement. In this study, instead of applying the calculation to a classroom, it was applied to an entire school.

The results of the study indicated that within a single school year, highly effective principals raise the average students achievement by between two and seven months of learning while ineffective principals lowered achievement by the same amount (Branch et al., 2012). By estimating the impact of the school building principal as it relates to student achievement Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin reaffirm the importance of the position and its potential impact on positive school outcomes. While the authors identify highly effective and ineffective principals, they do not attempt to explain what may cause these principals to succeed or fail in raising student outcomes.

The findings from recent studies linking student achievement and school leadership are encouraging. Policymakers, researchers, and others have recognized the critical role principals play in school improvement and raising student achievement. Unfortunately, school principals increasingly find themselves overwhelmed by their responsibilities as they assume multiple roles and broker the conflicting interests of a variety of stakeholders (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). The stress associated with the role of the principal leads to challenges in hiring and retaining effective school leaders (Anthony, 2016; Burrell, 2017).

Challenges in Principal Turnover, Recruitment and Retention

The principal attrition rate has become an increasing problem for districts across the country. A 2014 National Center for Education Statistics report analyzed the career decisions of thousands of public-school principals who had left their positions during the 2012-2013 school year. The report found that more than 50% of the 10,270 school administrators who changed/left their position had less than five years of experience. Specifically, 3,880 had less than three years of experience and 2,650 had three to five

years of experience (Goldring & Taie, 2014). That most school leaders who opt to change positions have less than 5 years of experience is concerning. Research has shown high principal turnover can have a damaging effect on various aspects of a school. Principal departure can lead to increased staff turnover, lower student achievement and increased financial costs to the district (Bteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012).

Further exacerbating the problem is the lack of desirable candidates to fill the increasing vacancies. In a 2007 study, data gathered by the Southern Regional Education Board found that several states, despite certifying enough candidates, still reported difficulty filling openings with quality principal candidates (Fry, Bottoms, O'Neill, & Walker). Many states and districts reported drawing primarily on a volunteer pool that includes many untested and often poorly qualified would-be principals (Fry et al., 2007). Even more troubling is that recent research suggests the shortage will continue for some time. For example, a 2010 study found that increased job stress and complexity will further accelerate retirement and attrition (Clifford).

The role of the school principal in its present form is at best undesirable and at worst unsustainable. According to a Metropolitan Life Insurance Company survey in 2013, school principals reported feeling under great stress at their job. Additionally, in the same survey, the percentage of school leaders who reported being satisfied in their work dropped from 68% to 59% since 2008 (Fullan, 2018). The cause of this stress can come from a variety of sources. For instance, Evans (2010) found that factors such as working long hours, unreachable expectations, excessive paperwork, and social problems contributed to the overwhelming stress principals felt on the job.

Additionally, a 2015 study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics highlighted the unreasonable amount of work placed on our nation's principals (Kena et al.). Data for the study were collected from public school principals and teachers across the country who responded to the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS). The purpose of the NTPS is to provide descriptive data on the context of elementary and secondary education in the United States. The study found that principals were working close to 60 hours per week and spending 30% of their time on administrative tasks not related to curriculum and instruction (Taie & Goldring, 2017). This study is further evidence of the increasing burden being placed on school leaders.

Considering these findings, the recruitment, training, and retention of effective school principals have taken on increased importance. Recognizing the impossible position principals are placed in, school districts, researchers, and policymakers are beginning to focus on how best to support these school leaders (Mitgang, 2013).

District-Principal Relationship

While a wide range of factors associated with principal turnover have emerged as statistically significant (Snodgrass Rangel, 2018), this study focused on the bureaucratic characteristics of school districts and their influence on the role of the principal. For this reason, the researcher examined the determinants of principal turnover that could be related to district structure. The current literature identified three characteristics of the principalship that predicted principal turnover. This included the degree of principal autonomy, relationships with the district, and the changing nature of the position (Snodgrass Rangel, 2018).

Negative findings about bureaucratic structures revealed workplaces that alienated employees, grew dissatisfaction, deterred creativity, and discouraged staff. When principals perceived they lacked autonomy, they were more likely to leave their position. In their research, Tekleselassie & Villarreal (2011) posited that principals who described having more autonomy would be less likely to leave the principalship or their schools. To support their claim, the researchers conducted an analysis to estimate variations in school and district characteristics and their impact on a principals' career departure and mobility intentions.

A key finding of the study recommended that districts may leverage retention by decentralizing key decisions to the school level. The study further found that principals specifically emphasized a desire for more control over budgeting, spending, and hiring teachers. Therefore, allowing principals to direct their focus and resources in ways that address their school needs and priorities may lead to a reduction in turnover (Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011).

According to research by Farley-Ripple, Raffel and Welch (2012), principals' views of their working relationships have a strong influence on principal retention. In their study, Farley-Ripple, Raffel and Welch (2012) examined the processes and forces that shape school administrator career paths. The study used a case study approach wherein interview data was collected from 48 principals and assistant principals. The coding and analysis of the transcripts identified patterns in processes and forces that influenced the careers of school administrators.

Specifically, the researchers found that, most career decisions were significantly influenced by other actors in the school system. However, regarding the self-initiated

decisions to move or stay, those decisions, were driven by relationships with students and by district support (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). Principals who reported having strong district support cited this as a beneficial working condition that influenced their decision to stay. Strong support was described by some as the central office giving them autonomy to make decisions and trusting their judgment (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012).

While recent research has established a need for school-level autonomy, many school leaders still find themselves required to implement initiatives and policies that were designed without their input. Making matters worse, such policies may not advance, or may even hinder their own school-level goals. Unfortunately, many times, districts do not give principals the chance to shape district policies in ways that meet the needs of their schools (Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, & Davis, 2014). The changing nature of the principalship has been cited as a potential reason for principals to leave their schools. Many principals do not think their job is achievable. In a survey of 247 principals, Ikemoto, Gates & Hamilton (2009) found that 72 percent of respondents lacked the necessary resources to fulfill all that is demanded of them to lead their school effectively. As a result, principals reported their time and attention was spread across so many responsibilities that they found themselves struggling to do any of them well enough.

Additionally, Jerald (2012) found that, on average, urban school principals spend only 8 to 17 percent of their time on instructional leadership activities. Even more troubling is that further evidence suggests that half of those activities lack sufficient focus to help teachers improve instruction. In a study of district support for school principals, Jerald (2012) found effective districts enabled principals to focus their time on the most important aspects of their job by limiting central office requests. These districts made

concerted efforts to reduce (a) requirements to leave the school buildings, (b) requests including paperwork mandates, (c) unexpected visits from district officials, and (d) last-minute data inquiries (Jerald, 2012). With less central office requests, principals prioritize district initiatives and critical instructional leadership activities.

Principals operating under a model of aligned autonomy expect to implement district initiatives in a manner that best fits their school. Chang, Leach, and Anderman (2015) studied principal-perceived autonomy and the principals' power to make independent decisions. After an analysis of survey responses from 1500 principals across the United States, they found that principals are more committed to their school districts and more satisfied with their jobs when they perceive their superintendents as supportive of autonomy at the building level (Chang et al., 2015). School principals who were empowered to be the decision-maker reported heightened feelings of control, which fostered feelings of making a difference. Principals need the authority and support from district leaders to select and hire the staff they need, allocate their site resources in a manner that supports the site goals, and make instructional decisions that address the unique needs of their population. When principals are allowed to consider the needs of their schools, meeting overall district goals can create learning environments that address the strengths and weaknesses of the population, involve their school communities, and set targeted goals that will increase student performance (Curcio, 2018).

When districts are reoriented to guide and support school leaders while still allowing them the freedom to make building level decisions, principals feel empowered to meet the unique needs of their schools. Principals who feel empowered have higher levels of job satisfaction and a stronger commitment to the organization (Chang et al.,

2015). Because of the important role principals play in school improvement efforts, redesigning districts to enable their work is a vital component of school reform. The importance of reorienting districts to create a more supportive workplace for principals is magnified when we realize the outsized impact principals have on student achievement as compared to the district and superintendent.

Impact of the Superintendent and District Offices

Since No Child Left Behind, and now with the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, policies governing public education have shifted to prioritize accountability through annual statewide assessment of student learning, student performance targets, and school ratings. As the federal and state government continue to expand their influence over educational policy, the school district increasingly finds itself as the intermediary between government mandates and school improvement efforts. Policymakers focus on the role of teachers and principals in improving student outcomes while little research has focused on the impact school districts have on academic achievement (Whitehurst, Chingos, & Gallaher, 2013). In a 2013 Brookings Institute Report, Whitehurst, Chingos and Gallaher sought to address the lack of research by measuring the district's statistical impact on student achievement in relation to other institutional components. As it relates to the current study, the research of Whitehurst, Chingos & Gallaher (2013) is essential in establishing the school district's role in improving student achievement.

In studying district impact, Whitehurst, Chingos & Gallaher (2013) began by analyzing ten years of data involving all public-school students and school districts in Florida and North Carolina. The analysis focused on 4th and 5th-grade reading and

mathematics state exam scores, measuring how much student achievement varied across districts in the context of student achievement at the school, classroom, and student levels. The study included controls for several variables including student age, race/ethnicity, cognitive disability status, free and reduced lunch program status, and limited English proficiency. The researchers found that school districts account for only 1% to 2% of the total variation in student achievement. This small impact measured far less than the influence of other factors such as demographic characteristics of students, teachers, schools and remaining individual differences among students (Whitehurst et al., 2013). Additionally, the analysis showed that when looking at just the institutional components affecting student achievement, schools have about twice the effect of districts, and teachers almost seven times the impact than that of districts. While a school districts effect was found to have a small impact on student achievement, the findings showed significant differences among the academic performance of demographically similar students in higher and lower performing districts (Whitehurst et al., 2013).

When comparing demographically similar student performance in between districts, the data showed that 4th and 5th grade students in a high performing district were more than nine weeks ahead of similar students in a lower performing district in term of their reading and math achievement. Additionally, when comparing district performance, the Whitehurst, Chingos & Gallaher (2013) noted that some districts have beat their demographic odds every year, some have consistently underperformed, some experienced steep declines, while others experienced transformative growth.

A limitation to the Whitehurst, Chingos & Gallaher (2013) study was that their approach could only identify possible district effects that resulted from differences

among districts in their practices. The study could not identify district effects that resulted from practices that were common to all districts.

The findings from the report are significant to the current study because they provide empirical evidence to support efforts to improve student achievement through district level reforms. It also supports further research into why some districts perform better than others and how that knowledge can be translated into action. Where Whitehurst, Chingos & Gallaher (2013) fall short is identifying common practices that could benefit school level personnel, the current study accounts for such important findings through qualitative research methods.

Building on the results of the previously mentioned study, Chingos, Whitehurst and Lindquist sought to determine the extent to which district effects on student achievement are due to the district leader instead of the characteristics of districts that are separate of their superintendents (2014). In the previous study Whitehurst, Chingos & Gallaher (2013) observed that districts account for only 1% to 2% of the total variation in student achievement. In this study, the researchers wanted to determine if the small (1% - 2%) differences in student achievement could be attributed to the superintendent and his or her observable characteristics or to characteristics of districts that are not synonymous with their superintendents.

An analysis of 10 years' worth of student achievement on state reading and mathematics tests in North Carolina and Florida along with Superintendent data linked to each district in those states, led to several findings. Chingos, Whitehurst and Lindquist (2014) concluded that (1) school district superintendents typically remained in their positions for three to four years, (2) the length of a superintendents tenure did not

improve student achievement, (3) hiring a new superintendent did not correlate with increased student achievement, (4) superintendents accounted for less than one percent (0.3 percent) of student differences in achievement, and (5) exceptional superintendents who have an impact on student achievement could not be reliably identified. At .3%, the effect of the superintendent on student achievement is considerably smaller than any other major component of the education system.

The role of school superintendent is a complex and demanding position. Those who fulfill this job in a school district have considerable influence over various aspects of the system. What this study has made clear however, is that generally speaking, the position of superintendent has a miniscule impact on student achievement within the districts they serve. The study's findings support the direction of the current research. Assuming that the goal of school system is to improve student achievement, school reformers focused on increasing student outcomes should not view the superintendent as a means to accomplish that goal. School improvement efforts are better focused on components that have a greater impact on student achievement such as teachers and principals.

Recognizing the minimal impact a superintendent (.3%) and school district (1%-2%) have on student achievement does not abdicate them of their responsibility to raise student achievement, but rather shifts their role in facilitating those gains. Understanding that significant impact on student achievement occurs at the school building level researchers and practitioners have focused on how best to support the work of those in school building.

Changing Role of the School District

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) cites the principal as a critical element missing from the ineffective reform efforts of the past. They claim that a central reason for the problems plaguing our current system “is the failure of many public-school districts to systematically provide the working conditions that well-trained principals need to succeed (Bottoms & Fry, 2009, p. 2).” A 2009 study conducted by SREB aimed to define better what was missing from districts’ support of principals’ working conditions. Bottoms and Fry (2009) collected interview responses from 22 principals, leading schools of various sizes, across 17 states. Bottoms and Fry (2009) then compared the interview responses of principals in high-performing and low-performing schools. Researchers found that principals at the most-improved high schools felt they had a collaborative working relationship with the district. They spoke at length of the district staff responsibilities for improving student achievement and the support they received from the district. Principals at the least-improved high schools described how the district office centralized most reform initiatives. They felt the district was not concerned about empowering and building the capacity of school leaders to be real players in school reform (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). The findings of this study highlight the importance of a supportive district-principal relationship in school improvement efforts.

Building on the previously mentioned research, Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis (2010) designed a study with the purpose of illuminating how districts support principals to improve student learning. Six district leaders from seven different school districts were interviewed by researchers. All interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed for responses classified as indicative of high or low support for principals. Findings from the

study show highly supportive districts are more proactive and more school and instruction oriented. Highly supportive districts had higher graduation rates and a higher percentage of schools meeting Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). While findings such as this may seem obvious, what was interesting is that districts identified as less supportive were not necessarily aware of their short comings. Some of the staff from less supportive districts believed that they were working hard and believed that they were effective. Those districts that were highly supportive developed their structures and systems over time, incorporating stakeholder input and guidance from outside organizations (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). The implications of this study are important for the proposed study. Becoming a highly supportive district and improving student achievement are not done quickly or haphazardly. This study supports the need for research into the current role of the principal and their relationship with the district to better design systems and structures that are supportive of the principal.

In 2014 the New Leaders organization released a report outlining a framework for creating conditions that supported school leader success. The significance of this report as it relates to the proposed study is that it emphasizes the important relationship between the school building principal and the district/school system. Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, and Davis (2014) highlight the importance of creating district level structures and systems to support the work of school principals. Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, and Davis (2014) conducted a comprehensive literature review of the conditions for effective school leadership, sought input from researchers and practitioners in the field of educational leadership and interviewed 22 principals and 12 district leaders. Ikemoto, Taliaferro,

Fenton, and Davis (2014) found that excellent school systems supported the work of strong school leaders and enabled this effectiveness across their districts. Too often, however, principals felt that districts undermined their school improvement efforts.

Many school districts mandate school leaders to complete a variety of tasks misaligned with the foundational school-based practices and policies that lead to positive school outcomes (Daly, Der-Martirosian, Ong-Dean, Park, & Wishard-Guerra, 2011). In interviews with school principals, building leaders often recalled navigating complex bureaucratic approval processes for basic services, and attending district-mandated meetings on topics only partially related to their core responsibilities (Ikemoto et al., 2014). Such tasks distracted principals from the instructional responsibilities that have a greater influence on student achievement. As a result, principals found it challenging to keep their time and attention on the leadership activities that mattered, such as providing feedback to teachers, evaluating student data, and developing climate of success within their buildings (Ikemoto et al., 2014).

The New Leaders report concluded that even as districts prioritize school leadership, they should also recognize that even the best leaders cannot achieve their potential within district structures and systems that do not support them and/or act as barriers to their success. Researchers emphasized that districts bear the primary responsibility for creating structures and conditions that enable school leaders to be effective (Ikemoto et al., 2014).

Relationship Between Prior Research and Present Study

The existing literature revealed that a school administrations behaviors, rules, and structures influenced teachers by either acting as supports or hindrances to

accomplishment of their duties (Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Sinden, 2002; Sinden et al., 2004). Recent research showed the vital position principals held as integral components of school improvement efforts (Béteille et al., 2012; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Principals coordinated various components of the school bureaucracy to facilitate school improvement initiatives and raise student achievement. Considering their influential role, researchers found it troubling principals described being overwhelmed by their responsibilities. Specifically, school leaders recalled the difficulty in assuming multiple roles and brokering the conflicting interests of a variety of stakeholders (Clifford, 2010; Evans, 2010; Fullan, 2018; Goldring & Taie, 2014; Jerald, 2012). The role of a principal has become stressful, and it is causing challenges in hiring and retaining effective school leaders (Clifford, 2010; Fry et al., 2007). This study advocated for the acknowledgement of the impossible position principals have been put in and encouraged district leaders to focus more their efforts on supporting their school administrators.

School districts have been found to be very influential regarding the role of the principal. When districts are reoriented to guide and support school leaders while still allowing them the freedom to make building-level decisions, principals feel empowered to meet the unique needs of their schools (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018; Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011). Empowered principals have higher levels of job satisfaction and a more substantial commitment to the organization (Chang et al., 2015). In this study, the researcher formulated insights into how school districts can be made more supportive of school leaders. The study advanced the current literature by identifying district practices that enabled and hindered the school principal. Moreover,

the study demonstrated the significance of reorienting districts to create of a more supportive workplace for principals. The importance of repositioning the district to be in a more supportive role is magnified with the realization that principals have an outsized impact on student achievement as compared to the district and Superintendent (Chingos et al., 2014; Whitehead, Boschee, & Decker, 2012; Whitehurst et al., 2013).

Furthermore, this study supported existing studies in highlighting the importance of a supportive district-principal relationship in school improvement efforts. The researcher emphasized school districts bear the primary responsibility for creating structures and conditions that enable school leaders (Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010; Ikemoto et al., 2014). Superintendents and district personnel hold the power and authority to create supportive structures and conditions. This study sought to offer empirical evidence to district leaders to inform their decisions when creating district level reforms. Previous studies failed to provide practices that can be common to all districts. Therefore, this research filled the gap by offering recommendations that could be implemented to initiate change.

The researcher acknowledged the role of the superintendent at the school district and the substantial influence they have over various aspects of the system. However, a primary objective of the school system is to improve student achievement, and the current literature revealed superintendents have minimal impact on student achievement (Chingos et al., 2014; Whitehurst et al., 2013). The study emphasized not seeing the superintendent as a direct lever for raising student achievement. Instead, the researcher advocated for greater focus on principals and teachers considering their demonstrated impact on the achievement of students. The role of the principal is challenging and needs

maximum support. The study recognized that some principals are more effective than others at raising student outcomes within their schools. It also assumed that the ability to raise student achievement can be hindered or enabled based on the supportive or coercive nature of the school district bureaucracy. By identifying enabling and hindering behaviors, rules and structures, the researcher hoped to provide more insight into the conditions that allowed for more highly effective principals to exist. Hence, the research showed how a collaborative framework between the superintendent and district offices facilitated the achievements of the principals at the school levels. The researcher grounded the study in advocating for the support of principals from all stakeholders to help them realize the set goals and objectives.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this mixed-methods, sequential, explanatory design regarding the school district-principal relationship. The sequential, explanatory design is a two-phase approach where the quantitative data are collected first, followed by a qualitative data collection. The purpose is to use the qualitative results to further explain and interpret the findings from the quantitative phase (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). In this study, the researcher collected quantitative data from survey responses to the Enabling District Structure (EDS) form and gathered qualitative data through interviews in a collective case study. In the quantitative phase of the study, principals noted the frequency at which they encountered district behaviors, rules, and structures that enabled and hindered their work. The investigator then analyzed the qualitative research to understand why a principal rated his/her district as hindering or enabling and how it influenced their efforts. The first section of Chapter 3 explains the methodology for conducting the quantitative phase of the study, and the second section describes the steps followed in the qualitative phase. Discussed in-depth in this chapter is the research plan, including the methodology, study participants, procedures, analysis method, and ethical concerns. The methodology and processes described below inform and outline the procedures the researcher took to analyze and interpret the data in the following chapter.

Research Questions

- 1) To what extent are district bureaucracies perceived as hindering or enabling by principals?

- 2) What behaviors, rules, and structures can be identified and described by principals as hindering as opposed to enabling?
- 3) How do hindering and enabling behaviors, rules, and structures of a district influence the work of school principals?

Mixed Method Design

Before the research design process can begin, the investigator must decide the suitable methodological standpoint from which to approach a research problem.

Traditionally, researchers have employed either quantitative or qualitative methods in their studies. According to Subedi (2016), the mixed method design has been utilized as an alternative approach, often employed in the social and behavioral sciences.

Educational researchers have favored the mixed- method approach to better understand phenomena under study and avoid the methodological bias inherent in strictly quantitative or qualitative research. One of the benefits to this design is that it presents a very practical research philosophy. Essentially, the mixed-method philosophy is to utilize whatever quantitative or qualitative methodological tools are needed to best answer the research question (Subedi, 2016). For this study, the researcher determined a mixed method study would be the most suitable approach.

Educational researchers must consider certain methodological issues when conducting a mixed method study. First, investigators need to determine if they will prioritize the quantitative or qualitative data collection and analysis. Although both methods are used, typically one approach is given greater emphasis. Additionally, researchers should establish the sequence of the data collection and analysis, as well as

the stage in the research process at which results from both approaches are integrated into the findings (Subedi, 2016).

For this study, the researcher implemented a sequential explanatory design. The sequential explanatory design is a popular structure for educational researchers (Subedi, 2016). In this design structure, the researcher first collects and analyzes quantitative data and then qualitative data. The rationale for structuring the study in this way is so that the quantitative findings provide a general picture of the research problem while a more thorough qualitative data collection is used to explain and extend the quantitative results (Subedi, 2016). The phases of research are connected at the intermediary portion of the study with the findings integrated after all research and analysis has been completed.

In this study, the researcher's goal was to identify hindering and enabling district practices and understand how they influenced the work of the principal. The researcher structured the study according to the sequential explanatory design outlined by Subedi (2016). The study began by collecting cross-sectional survey data to determine the extent to which principals perceived their districts as hindering and enabling their work. Next, the researcher conducted a quantitative data analysis using descriptive statistics. The quantitative data presented a general picture of New York State (NYS) principals' perceptions of their district practices. The researcher connected the quantitative and qualitative phases by purposefully selecting interview participants based on survey data and utilizing an interview protocol designed to further explore survey results. The researcher then conducted in-depth interviews of principals to identify enabling and hindering district practices and understand how those practices influenced their work. Using the interview transcripts, the researcher conducted multiple cycles of coding to

identify themes within and across cases. Finally, the researcher integrated the quantitative and qualitative results through an explanation and interpretation of the findings.

The mixed method, sequential explanatory design provided the researcher with the most appropriate approach for answering the previously stated research questions. The following sections of this chapter will provide a more thorough explanation of the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research.

Quantitative Study

Research Design

The quantitative component of this study sought to understand the extent to which principals perceive district bureaucracies to be hindering or enabling by measuring the frequency at which principals encountered hindering and enabling behaviors, rules, and structures found within NYS school districts (RQ1). A cross-sectional survey research design was selected because it is appropriate for describing the attitudes or opinions of a population at a single point in time (Creswell, 2012). Rather than create a new instrument, the researcher modified an existing form, Hoy's (2003b) Enabling School Structure (ESS) form. To collect responses from thousands of principals across New York state, the researcher utilized a web-based questionnaire. The data collected was then summarized using descriptive statistics in the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program and the results motivated the mixed method portion of the study. Details on the instrument, sample, and data analysis follow.

Reliability and Validity of the Research Design

According to Briggs, Coleman, and Morrison (2012), research reliability is the probability that repeating a research procedure produces identical or similar results.

While the cross-sectional survey methodology is appropriate for use toward the goal of describing the population of principals and their perceptions toward the bureaucracy, there are concerns such as selection into taking the survey and survey response bias that could limit both the internal and external validity of the results. In particular, conducting this study during the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to different reported perceptions relative to conducting the study at a less tumultuous time. While these limitations do not invalidate the study, they motivate the need for replication and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Instrument

The researcher surveyed NYS principals using a modified version of Hoy's Enabling School Structure (ESS) form (2003b), which the author renamed the Enabling District Structure (EDS) form. Hoy's ESS form measured the degree to which a school's structure is enabling or hindering; it utilizes a 12-item questionnaire (Hoy, 2003b). The ESS form measures items using a 5-point Likert scale and produces a cumulative score. The survey items reflect a single continuous variable, enabling school structure, by describing the two most salient dimensions of bureaucracy, formalization, and centralization (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001).

According to Hoy and Sweetland, the ESS form is a balanced measure with six, positive loading, enabling items, and six negative loading, hindering items (2001). To account for this, when scoring responses items 1, 3, 5, 6, 10, and 12 are scored 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 corresponding to the extent of frequency of each item, with never = 1 and always = 5. Conversely, items 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 11 are reversed scored. These items are scored 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 with never = 5 and always = 1. To determine a single respondent's perception

of the school, responses are summed across items. The higher the school structure scores on the scale, the more enabling the school structure is perceived to be and conversely, the lower the score, the more hindering the structure is perceived (Hoy, 2003b). To compare schools, first, each respondents' average ESS score is calculated by dividing the cumulative score described above by the number of questions the respondent answered. The average school score is computed by summing each respondent's average score of each respondent and then dividing by the number of respondents in the school (Hoy, 2003b).

In the development of the ESS form, Hoy and Sweetland conducted three studies to determine the reliability and validity of the ESS form. In the first study, 24 descriptive statements about school bureaucracy were developed into a questionnaire to measure formalization and centralization within school organizations (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). This 24-item questionnaire was given to 61 teachers in three educational administration courses at The Ohio State University. The teachers worked in 61 different schools representing rural, urban, and suburban settings and 90% of teachers returned usable questionnaires. After a principal-axis factor analysis, it was found that many items loaded strongly for both centralization and formalization rather than two distinct factors. As a result of the findings, Hoy and Sweetland turned to a one factor solution. Under the one factor solution, factor loadings ranged from .40 to .81. All the enabling items loaded positively as the researchers had predicted, and the hindering items had negative loadings. Hoy and Sweetland (2000) concluded the one-factor solution was the best solution both conceptually and empirically. The 24 items combined to form a single scale of enabling bureaucracy with strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$).

Hoy and Sweetland's initial study also provided some evidence of validity. Based on their previous research Hoy and Sweetland theorized that enabling bureaucracies would not be characterized by hierarchical structures that promoted dependence and rule following. In this study dependence on the hierarchy ($r = -.62, p < .01$) and dependence on rules ($r = -.25, p < .05$) were negatively related to enabling bureaucracy. The more enabling the school structure, the less constrained teachers were by the hierarchy of the rules. These results offered some initial evidence for the validity of enabling bureaucracy (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). One limitation of this study was the small number of school's locations within one state.

Hoy and Sweetland second study addressed the previously mentioned limitations by using a broader sample of 116 schools, with one educator from each school, across five different states. Graduate students in education administration programs completed the survey with 89% returning usable questionnaires. The new data were analyzed in the same manner as the previous study. A principal-axis factor analysis was used and, consistent with the results of the first sample, all the items arrayed themselves along a bipolar continuum from enabling at one end to hindering at the other. All the items had strong factor loadings ranging from .53 to .81, and an alpha coefficient of reliability of .96. This showed the researchers that the data from the second sample had the same factor structure as the initial sample.

Critical factors from the two studies highlight enabling formalization and enabling centralization were not independent but instead formed a unitary bipolar factor. The factor was measured reliably and validly with a 24-item Likert-type scale (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). A significant limitation of these studies was that the measure of

bureaucracy determined the perceptions of only one faculty member per school. The third study by Hoy and Sweetland replicated the results of the previous two studies with a sample of schools with multiple respondents for each school. Additionally, the researchers reduced the number of items in the questionnaire selecting 12 items with the most substantial factor loadings while still ensuring equal representation of hindering and enabling statements.

The third study conducted by Hoy and Sweetland surveyed teachers from 97 Ohio high schools across urban, suburban, and rural settings. Responses to each of the 12-items were aggregated to the school level to create a school score. The data were collected and analyzed to assess the factor stability, validity, and reliability of the 12-item, enabling bureaucracy scale. Again, the researchers conducted a principal-axis factor analysis of the selected 12 items. The current sample replicated the results of the earlier two samples in an even stronger fashion. The factor loadings ranged from .69 to .86, with 10 of the 12 loadings being .8 or greater. The variance explained by the factor was 64.4%, which was greater than the 46.8% explained in the first sample, and the 53.6 of variance explained in the second sample. Finally, the alpha coefficients for the scale in each sample were .90 in the first study, .93 for the second study, and .95 for the third study (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001).

The construct and predictive validity of the ESS form has been strongly supported in studies (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000, 2001). With Hoy's permission, the researcher modified the ESS Form slightly to reflect the district, as opposed to school structures. Specifically, the word "school" was replaced with the word "district," the word "superintendent" replaced the word "principal," and the word "principal" replaced with

the word “teacher.” Appendix B contains a copy of the modified Enabling School Structure form, which the researcher named the Enabling District Structure form.

Appendix D contains the permission to use and adapt the ESS Form.

Procedures for Collecting Data

The researcher followed the steps below to collect data for this portion of the study. The researcher sent an email containing the EDS survey to NYS public school principals (excluding NYC), through the survey collection website, www.SurveyMonkey.com. The link to the survey was hyperlinked in an email explaining the scope and purpose of the study and providing full disclosure of risk, benefits, and voluntary participation as required by the Human Subject protection. Completion of the survey was considered implied consent, and potential respondents were given one month to self-administer the computer-based survey. The researcher followed up with a reminder email once a week and then closed the survey four weeks after the original date of contact. The data were downloaded to a secure, password protected laptop and flash drive that was kept under lock and key and only available to the researcher.

Research Ethics

For research to be ethical, individuals should make his or her own decision about whether to participate or continue participating in a study. The informed consent process requires a person be advised of information needed to make an informed decision. A central role of the researcher is to share the voluntary nature of the informed consent process. The participant has an option to participate or withdrawal from the study (HHS.gov, 2017).

Before answering the survey questions, participants read a message informing them of the purpose, methods, risks, and benefits of participating in the survey. The message stated that the completion of the survey was voluntary, participants could skip any question, and discontinue the survey at any time. Clicking on the link and completing the survey would serve as the respondents' consent to participate in the study. The informed consent message can be found in Appendix E.

Another important aspect of ethical research is to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of participants and data. The www.SurveyMonkey.com web-based response platform has an Anonymous Response collector option, which the researcher utilized to collect data for this study. This option allowed the researcher to exclude personal information, including first name, last name, email address, and IP address from the results. The researcher informed participants that the confidentiality of their research records would be strictly maintained and that their identity and answers would remain anonymous. The researcher stated their intent to report survey results in the aggregate, and no names, email addresses, IP addresses, or other identifying information will be collected, reported, or stored. Once the survey window closed, the investigator downloaded responses to a password protected computer and flash drive. All items were kept securely under lock and key in the home of the researcher.

Sample

The researcher conducted a census of NYS public school principals (N=2996). The investigator compiled the sample for this study using the "Directory of Public and Non-Public School Administrators for the State of New York," published by NYSED.gov. The investigator collected email addresses for the public-school principals

on this list from their respective school and district websites. Since many non-public schools are governed by unique bureaucratic or administrative organizations that may possess their unique structures of influence, the researcher did not include non-public school administrators in this study. Additionally, New York City public schools were excluded from the study due to restrictions on research within the organization. The selection of a single state was also purposeful, as it is acknowledged that state-specific regulations, standards, and governments have numerous and distinctive impacts on school systems.

The researcher emailed the survey to principals, who opted into completing the EDS survey and submitted their data through the SurveyMonkey platform. Because the researcher selected a sample that was convenient, available, and representative of a specific group, and because only the participants that were willing to participate were included in the study, the sample of New York State public school principals was a non-probabilistic, convenience sample (Creswell, 2012).

Of the 2,996 public school principals invited to complete the survey, the web-based platform was able to deliver 2,895 emails as 61 principals opted out, and 40 email addresses were no longer in use or blocked by spam filters. Out of the 2,895 delivered emails, 52.5% (1,521) opened the email. Ultimately 244 principals completed the survey. Principals' responses were anonymous and resulted in an 8.4% (244) return rate. Consequently, all schools and demographic data referenced in this study are based solely on principals' responses. Below, Table 2 contains demographic data for the survey participants, and Table 3 displays data related to the school setting in which the respondents work.

Table 1*Description of EDS Survey Participants' Demographics*

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Female	113	46.3
Male	123	50.4
Gender variant/Non-conforming	0	0
Prefer not to answer	8	3.3
Not Listed	0	0
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	0.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	4	1.7
Black or African American	23	9.5
Hispanic	10	4.1
White/Caucasian	197	81.4
Multiple Ethnicity/Other	7	2.9
Years in current position		
< 1 year	4	1.6
1 – 3 years	46	18.9
3 – 5 years	46	18.9
5 – 10 years	69	28.3
> 10 years	79	32.4

Gender. The researcher measured the gender of the respondents using a 5-point metric with the following possible response categories: Female, Male, Gender variant/Non-conforming, Prefer not to answer, and Not listed. Of the 5 possible options, only 3 registered responses. Participants in the sample split almost evenly between male (50.4%) and female (46.3%) with a small group preferring not to answer (3.3%).

Race/Ethnicity. Respondents recorded their race on a six-point system of measurement, selecting one of the following possible responses: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Hispanic, White/Caucasian, and Multiple Ethnicity/Other. All categories noted at least one

respondent with the most participants identifying as White/Caucasian (81.4%).

Participants also selected Black or African American (9.5%), Hispanic (4.1%), Multiple Ethnicity (2.9%), Asian Pacific Islander (1.7%), and one participant selected American Indian or Alaskan Native (.4%).

Years in Current Position. One item on the EDS form asked principals to log the number of years they have been in their current position. With respect to this variable, possible responses ranged from a low of less than 1 year, to a high of more than 10 years. Most participants had over ten years of experience in their position (32.4%). The remaining principals in the sample selected 5-10 years of experience (28.3%), 3-5 years (18.9%), 1-3 years (18.9%), with the fewest respondents having less than 1 year of experience (1.6%).

Table 2

Description of EDS Survey Participants' School Settings

Variable	N	%
School Setting		
Urban	14.3	35
Suburban	51.2	125
Rural	34.4	84
% of students qualify for Free Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL)		
0 – 25	64	26.2
26 – 50	74	30.3
51 – 75	64	26.2
76 – 100	42	17.2

School Setting. The investigator included the school setting variable on the EDS form to note the kind of community in which a principal worked. For this question, participants selected either Urban, Suburban, or Rural. According to the results, most respondents work in suburban schools (51.2%), with principals in rural schools (34.4%)

as the next most common setting. Principals selecting the urban setting (14.3%) made up the smallest percentage of the sample for this variable.

Free Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL). Educational researchers often measure the level of poverty in the student population, using the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) metric (Domina et al., 2018). On the EDS survey, principals recorded the level of poverty at their school. The researcher measured poverty along a 4-point metric. Possible responses increased in 25-point increments with the following possible response categories: 0-25%, 26-50%, 51-75% and 76-100%. The range of participant selections distributed similarly across all 4 categories. More principals worked in schools with 26-50% of students qualifying for FRPL (30.3%) than any other category. The same percentage of principals worked in schools with 0-25% FRPL (26.2%) as those working in schools with 51-75% FRPL (26.2%). Principals working in the highest poverty schools with 76-100% of students qualifying for FRPL made up the smallest group (17.2%) measured by this metric.

Data Cleaning and Analysis

After data was collected, the researcher began to prepare the data for analysis. When scoring data the researcher assigned a numeric value to each response category for each question on the EDS survey (Creswell, 2012). On the EDS form, respondents answered 12 questions about their district bureaucracy, two demographic questions, and three questions about their school setting. The codebook in Table 1 illustrates how the researcher scored each variable on the EDS form. Items 2-13 assess a principal's perception about various aspects of their district bureaucracy. These items described aspects of the bureaucracy and measured the level of frequency in which principals

encountered them. The investigator measured frequency using a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from “Never” to “Always.” Creswell (2012) recommends that when using a Likert scale each question should be scored consistently. However, in the EDS form there are six, positive loading items, and six negative loading items. To account for this, when scoring responses, items 2, 4, 5, 7, 11, and 13 are scored 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 corresponding to the extent of frequency of each item, with never = 1 and always = 5. Conversely, items 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, and 12 are reversed scored. These items are scored 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 with never = 5 and always = 1. The demographic and school setting questions used categorical scales to organize responses. The numbering assignments for demographic and school setting responses can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 3

Codebook for Enabling District Structure Survey

Item	Variable	Description	Scoring
1	Setting	Setting of the principal’s school	1.00 = Urban, 2.00 = Suburban, 3.00 = Rural
2	Auth_Comm	Rules enable authentic communication	1.00 = Never, 2.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 4.00 = Fairly Often, 5.00 = Always
3	Red_Tape	Red tape is a problem	5.00 = Never, 4.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 2.00 = Fairly Often, 1.00 = Always
4	Hier_Enab	Hierarchy enables principals	1.00 = Never, 2.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 4.00 = Fairly Often, 5.00 = Always
5	Hier_Obst_SA	Hierarchy obstructs student achievement	5.00 = Never, 4.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 2.00 = Fairly Often, 1.00 = Always
6	Rule_Hind	Rules help rather than hinder	1.00 = Never, 2.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 4.00 = Fairly Often, 5.00 = Always

7	Hier_Mission	Hierarchy supports district mission	1.00 = Never, 2.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 4.00 = Fairly Often, 5.00 = Always
8	Rule_Solution	Rules guides to solutions	1.00 = Never, 2.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 4.00 = Fairly Often, 5.00 = Always
9	Rule_Punish	Rules are used to punish	5.00 = Never, 4.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 2.00 = Fairly Often, 1.00 = Always
10	Hier_Obst_Inn	Hierarchy obstructs innovation	5.00 = Never, 4.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 2.00 = Fairly Often, 1.00 = Always
11	Rule_Subst_Jud	Rules replace professional judgement	5.00 = Never, 4.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 2.00 = Fairly Often, 1.00 = Always
12	Sup_Undermine	Superintendent undermines principal	5.00 = Never, 4.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 2.00 = Fairly Often, 1.00 = Always
13	Authority_Enab	Authority enables principals	1.00 = Never, 2.00 = Once in a While, 3.00 = Sometimes, 4.00 = Fairly Often, 5.00 = Always
14	Gender	Sex of the principal	1.00 = Female, 2.00 = Male, 3.00 = Non-conforming, 4.00 = Prefer not to answer
15	Race	Race of the principal	1.00 = Amer. Indian, 2.00 = Asian, 3.00 = Black, 4.00 = Hispanic, 5.00 = White
16	Experience	Experience level of the principal	1.00 = < 1 year, 2.00 = 1-3 years, 3.00 = 3-5 years, 4.00 = 5-10 years, 5.00 = >10 years
17	FRPL	Percent of students at the principal's school that qualify for Free and Reduced Price Lunch	1.00 = 0-25%, 2.00 = 26-50%, 3.00 = 51-75%, 4.00 = 76-100%

The researcher selected the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program to analyze the EDS survey data. The SPSS program is a commonly used

program for statistical analysis in educational research, and the researcher had previous experience using the software. The researcher downloaded survey response data from the EDS form directly to the statistical analysis software, SPSS. The SPSS program assigned each respondent a randomly generated ID, and the investigator replaced column headings with the names of the variables found in Table 1. With the information scored, entered into SPSS, and variables labeled appropriately, the researcher began the data analysis process.

In RQ1, the investigator intended to measure the extent to which principals perceived the district bureaucracy to be hindering or enabling. Before conducting an analysis to answer RQ1 the researcher conducted a principal-axis factor analysis and a reliability test to assess the dataset's reliability and factor structure. The researcher then performed a descriptive analysis of results. A descriptive analysis described results to individual variables and was appropriate to further understand the population under study (Creswell, 2012). In choosing the type of descriptive statistics test, the researcher selected the mean as the measure of central tendency and the standard deviation as the measure of variability. The investigator used the calculation of means and standard deviations to identify patterns in the frequency distributions of each variable. The mean score reflected how often the principal encountered enabling and hindering district practices. The standard deviation was used to determine the variation in responses for each item. The researcher used the standard deviation data to determine the level of agreement within the responses. The greater the standard deviation, the less agreement between principals regarding that aspect of the district bureaucracy. The researcher used the data to identify aspects of the school district bureaucracy that NYS principals found to be enabling and

hindering their work. The researcher also used the instrument to request participation in the qualitative portion of this study. The collection and analysis of the quantitative results completes the first portion of the sequential explanatory research process.

Using the individual principal responses, the researcher intentionally sought out principals with opposing perspectives of their district's practices. The qualitative research was used to understand why a principal rated aspects of their district as hindering or enabling and how it influenced their efforts. Lalor, Dympna, Elliott, Coyne, Comiskey, Higgins, Murphy, Devane, and Begley (2013) found case study to be a powerful research strategy within sequential explanatory mixed method designs. The case study component adds completeness to the exploration of complex issues in educational research (Lalor et al., 2013).

In this study the case is bound by data from the EDS survey and the relevant theoretical frameworks of Hoy and Sweetland (2001). The case study assisted in uncovering the complexity of the district-principal relationship. The researcher integrated the various data sources by comparing the trends from the EDS survey data with the patterns and themes found in the experiences of two principals participating in the collective case study. As an example, in item two, survey results demonstrated how frequently principals found their district rules enabled authentic communication with the district administrators. The case study data identified rules that facilitated authentic communication, and as well as rules that obstructed authentic communication. The qualitative data from the case study uncovered the underlying factors influencing a principal's perception of their district. To ensure accurate conclusions can be drawn from the data, the researcher must design a reliable and valid study.

Qualitative Study

For the qualitative portion of the research, the investigator implemented an instrumental, collective case study methodology to identify and explore the impact of hindering and enabling district structures. In a collective case study, a researcher selects two or more cases to illustrate a topic. Commonly, cases are selected to show different perspectives on an issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher chose two principals with opposing perspectives on the enabling and the hindering nature of their school districts. An instrumental case study focuses on an issue of concern and then selects a case to illustrate this issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the study, the researcher focused on the issue of enabling and hindering school district bureaucracy and selected cases that would inform both typologies. For studies in which researchers can only observe real-world environments, a case study design offers a framework to perform viable research (Yin, 2017). The purpose of the case studies is not to understand the dynamics of bureaucratic structures in these districts specifically, but more of New York State school district bureaucracies in general.

Specific Research Questions

The qualitative portion of this mixed method study explores the influence of district structures on the work of NYS public school principals. Data were gathered to address the following research questions:

- 1) What behaviors, rules, and structures can be identified and described by the principals as hindering?

- 2) What behaviors, rules, and structures can be identified and described by the principals as enabling?
- 3) How do the hindering and enabling behaviors, rules, and structures of a district influence the work of school principals?

Participants

The pool of potential participants for the collective case study was comprised of respondents to the EDS survey who volunteered to participate in the qualitative research. For the collective case study, the researcher chose a sample size of two individuals. Limiting the sample size to two principals allowed the researcher to collect extensive details about each respondents' experiences and provided ample data to identify themes. Creswell (2018) and Yin (2017) recommend a collective case study have no more than four people. Wolcott (2008) notes any more than one participant dilutes the level of detail a researcher provides. The researcher used purposive maximal sampling to select principals from this pool for participation in the collective case study. In purposeful sampling, the researcher selects individuals for study because they purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this phase, two NYS principals provided insight into enabling and hindering district structures and how those structures influenced their work. Maximum variation sampling is often used in collective case studies. This approach consists of selecting criteria in advance to differentiate participants and then selecting participants that are very different based on the criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher chose responses to the Enabling District Structure form as the criteria to differentiate participants. The investigator then identified respondents from the pool of volunteers who rated their

district as more hindering and those that rated it as more enabling. The researcher contacted individuals in each group to schedule interviews. One participant from the group that rated their district as more enabling, and one participant from the group that rated their district as more hindering participated in phone interviews. Maximum variation sampling increased the likelihood that the findings would reflect different perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an approach to sampling, purposive maximal sampling was ideal for this study because the researcher gained multiple perspectives of hindering and enabling practices, and a deeper understanding of the complexity of these behaviors, rules and structures (Creswell, 2012). Table 4 displays the demographic data of each participant for ease of comparison.

Table 4

Description of Interview Participants' Demographics and School Setting

Participant	Gender	Race	Years in Current Position	School Setting	% of students qualify for Free Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)
Principal 1	Female	White	>10	Suburban	0-25
Principal 2	Female	Hispanic	3-5	Suburban	26-50

Principal One. The first respondent interviewed for the collective case study was Principal One. The researcher selected Principal One from the pool of volunteers because their responses to the EDS survey indicated they perceived their district as more hindering in nature. To determine a single respondent's perception of their district, the researcher summed responses across items. The higher the district structure score, the more enabling the district structure is perceived to be and conversely, the lower the score, the more hindering the structure is perceived (Hoy, 2003b). The cumulative score of the

responses provided by Principal One equaled 12. This was the lowest score a respondent could give when rating their district. Principal One is a white female with more than 10 years of experience working as a principal at their school. Principal One works at a suburban, elementary school and indicated that their school has less than 25% of students receiving Free and Reduced-Price Lunch. Principal One holds a Doctor of Education.

Principal Two. The second respondent interviewed for the collective case study was Principal Two. The researcher selected Principal Two from the pool of volunteers because their responses to the EDS survey indicated they perceived their district as more enabling in nature. To determine a single respondent's perception of their district, the researcher summed responses across items. The higher the district structure scores, the more enabling the district structure is perceived to be and conversely, the lower the score, the more hindering the structure is perceived (Hoy, 2003b). Principal Two provided responses resulting in a cumulative score of 57. This score indicated Principal Two perceived most aspects of their district to be very enabling. A cumulative score of 60 is the highest score a principal can rate their district. Principal Two is a Hispanic female with three to five years of experience working as a principal at their school. Principal Two works at a suburban school and indicated that the school has 26-50% of students receiving Free and Reduced-Price Lunch. Principal Two is currently pursuing a Doctor of Education. Table 5 presents the individual responses of each participant on the EDS survey and allows for easy comparison.

Table 5*Principal Responses to Enabling District Structure Form*

Item description	Principal 1		Principal 2	
	Response	Score	Response	Score
Administrative rules enable authentic communication	Never	1	Always	5
In this district red tape is a problem	Always	1	Once in a while	4
The administrative hierarchy enables principals	Never	1	Always	5
The administrative hierarchy obstructs student achievement	Always	1	Never	5
Administrative rules help rather than hinder	Never	1	Fairly Often	4
Administrative hierarchy facilitates the mission of the district	Never	1	Always	5
Administrative rules are guides to solutions rather than rigid procedures	Never	1	Fairly Often	4
Administrative rules are used to punish principals	Always	1	Never	5
Administrative hierarchy obstructs innovation	Always	1	Never	5
Administrative rules are substitutes for professional judgment	Always	1	Never	5
Authority of superintendent used to undermine principals	Always	1	Never	5
Administrators use their authority to enable principals	Never	1	Always	5
Average		1.0		4.75

*When scoring responses items 1, 3, 5, 6, 10, and 12 are scored 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 corresponding to the extent of frequency of each item, with never = 1 and always = 5. Conversely, items 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 11 are reversed scored. These items are scored 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 with never = 5 and always = 1.

Data Collection Procedures

In selecting the appropriate methodology for qualitative data collection, it is important for the researcher to consider what they want to know (Merriam, 1998). In the

current study, the researcher sought to use qualitative data to further understand the results from the quantitative study. Specifically, the researcher wanted to know, what district practices principals identified as hindering? What practices could be identified as enabling? And how did those district practices affect the work of the principal? Yin (2017) suggests that when answering “how?” and “why?” questions, case studies have a distinct advantage. Case study methodology demands that the researcher collect a wide range of data from multiple sources. The large quantity of qualitative data gathered during the case study process provides unique insights about a topic that would otherwise be missed in surveys or other narrow forms of data collection (Merriam, 1998). For these reasons, the researcher chose to conduct a case study to understand further and explain what district practices principals would identify as enabling and hindering (RQ2) and how those practices influence their work (RQ3). After selecting the case study approach as the most appropriate methodology for studying and understanding enabling and hindering district practices, the researcher chose to refine the approach and utilize an instrumental, collective case study design.

Qualitative case studies can be categorized into three different variations based on the focus of the analysis and the intent (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher constructed this study with characteristics of both instrumental and collective case study designs. Creswell (2018) characterizes an instrumental case study as the researcher focusing on an issue and then using the subject of the case study to illustrate the problem. For the study, the issue was the influence of the district bureaucracy on the role of the principal, and the principals under study were the subjects that shed light on the topic. In a collective case study, the investigator uses multiple cases in their research to better

understand the issue. One approach is to seek out diverse candidates for each case to gather different perspectives on the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher focused on identifying and understanding the influence of enabling district practices and hindering district practices. The collective case study design allowed the investigator to gather data on both types of district practices by studying two principals who rated their districts as hindering or enabling in nature. The data gathered from these opposing perspectives revealed details about each type of district bureaucracy. The researcher chose the instrumental case study design as it was most appropriate for the goals of the study. According to Yin (2017), in situations where a researcher is attempting to understand why an unknown is occurring as a means to developing a framework, an instrumental multiple case study approach should be selected as the appropriate method. The data gathered from the qualitative study informed the researcher in the development of a prototype framework for understanding enabling and hindering district behaviors, practices, and structures.

Case study methodology demands that the investigator gather data from multiple sources. Commonly, a researcher will conduct interviews, observations and an artifact analysis as the means for collecting data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the researcher gathered data for the collective case study through interviews. Originally, the study design included observations and artifact analysis. However, due to the social distancing guidelines because of the Covid-19 pandemic, observations were disallowed under St. John's University IRB protocols. Additionally, despite requests, research participants did not provide artifacts for analysis. In determining the data collection

process, the researcher relied on guidance from Merriam (1998), Creswell and Poth (2018).

Once a researcher identifies a problem to study, they must decide what information should be collected and how to best obtain that information (Merriam, 1998). Interviews are one of the most common forms of qualitative data collection (Merriam, 1998). The function of the interview in qualitative research is to understand the issue from the subject's perspective and uncover meaning from their experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews are necessary when the investigator cannot observe behaviors, feelings or how people interpret the world. It is considered a best technique when case studies are focused on a small number of individuals (Merriam, 1998). In determining whether or not to conduct interviews as a means of data collection, the researcher should consider the kind of information needed and if the interview is the best method to obtain that information (Merriam, 1998).

The goal of this study was to understand the influence of the district bureaucracy on the role of the school principal. The researcher sought to identify the district office behaviors, rules, and structures that principals felt enabled and hindered their work. Additionally, the researcher wanted to understand how those behaviors, rules, and structures influenced their efforts. In his seminal work "Interviewing as Qualitative Research," Seidman (2019) states that at its' foundation, interviewing is "an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (p.9)". The data the researcher intended to gather would come from a principal's lived experience interacting with the district bureaucracy. For this reason, the investigator determined interviews would be the most effective method for obtaining this

information and therefore made them the primary form of data collection for the collective case study. Seidman's (2019) research would guide the investigators approach to the interview process. Interviews generated lists of behaviors, rules, and structures the principals viewed as impeding and supporting their work.

After determining what information needs to be collected to answer the research questions, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend the interviewer identify interviewees that can best provide this information. For this study, the researcher conducted interviews with two principals. These principals were purposefully selected based on their survey responses to give diverse perspectives on district bureaucracies (additional information on participant selection can be found in the Participant section above). Once the interviewees have been identified the researcher should distinguish the type of interview by deciding which mode is practical and will net the most useful information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Highly structured, semi structured, and open-ended interviews are three types of interview formats commonly used in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). The interviewer determines the appropriate interview structure based on the type of responses and information they seek. Most qualitative investigations use more open-ended and semi-structured format when interviewing participants (Merriam, 1998). To identify enabling and hindering behaviors, rules, and practices, the researcher desired to keep the focus of the interview on those specific components of the district bureaucracy yet allow for interviewees to define their experiences in their own unique way. To elicit this type of information the investigator used a semi-structured interview format.(Merriam, 1998). In this approach the interviewer took each interviewee through the exact same sequence of questions. A drawback to this level of structure is the flexibility in the interview is

limited. A strength of this format is that it is easier to maintain the focus of the interview on the topic of study. Furthermore, data is complete for each participant since they are given the same basic questions in the same order, and variations that may result from external factors can be minimized (Merriam, 1998). Finally, having the defined set of questions allowed for the interview protocol to be available for inspection by decision makers, participants, and other potential users of the information.

An interview protocol is a form in qualitative data collection a researcher uses to direct the activities in the interview and record information provided by the interviewee (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The form includes substantive questions related to the research questions, instructions, and other relevant information. Use of an interview protocol reflects best practices for conducting qualitative research interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher used an interview protocol that reflects the items surveyed in EDS form. Just as the EDS form is a slightly modified version of a previously established instrument (Enabling School Structure form), the interview protocol implemented by the researcher is a slightly modified version of an interview protocol created by Sinden (2002).

Sinden designed an interview protocol to elicit, from teachers, detailed examples of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities that characterized enabling or hindering school bureaucracies. Sinden's (2002) interview protocol was based on the Enabling School Structure form created by Hoy (2003b). Where Sinden's protocol focused on teachers describing their school, the modified version used in this study asked principals to describe their district bureaucracy. The questions were designed to encourage participants to give detailed examples of experiences, behaviors, and practices that

characterize enabling or hindering district bureaucracies. Responses also provided insight into what participants would like to see in the future.

Sinden's interview protocol (2002) was developed and subjected to review by professors in the College of Education at The Ohio State University. The questions were designed to elicit appropriate responses by being constructed to reflect assumptions that bureaucracies are enabling or hindering (Sinden, 2002). The interview protocol was pilot tested with experienced teachers and modified based on the input of the professors and the teachers in the pilot test (Sinden, 2002). The interview protocol utilized by the researcher for this study included an opening statement intended to inform participants about what would be asked, who will see and use the information, the purpose of collecting the information, how the information will be used, and gave assurances of confidentiality. The researcher modified Sinden's (2002) interview protocol by substituting the word "principal" with the word "superintendent," the word, "teacher" with the word "principal," the word "school" with the word "district." See Appendix B for the modified interview protocol utilized in this study.

The researcher conducted two interviews using the interview protocol. Permission to audio record the interviews was gained and participants were asked to sign the consent form. See Appendix F for Consent form and Confidentiality script. The first interview elicited responses from a principal who rated her district as hindering (Principal One) and the second interview elicited responses from a principal who rated her district as enabling (Principal Two). The researcher intentionally avoided any analysis of interview data until both interviews had been completed. This was done to prevent the researcher from imposing meaning from one participant interview onto the next (Seidman, 2019). The

interviews were conducted by phone in July and August of 2020, with each session lasting between 30 and 40 minutes depending on scheduling and the flow of conversation. Although a face-to-face interview is preferred, Seidman (2019) acknowledges that challenges with distance, time and money create occasions when the researcher and participant may agree to phone interviews. For this study, Principal 1 and Principal 2 lived and worked hundreds of miles from the researcher making in-person interviews a costly and time-consuming endeavor. For this reason, both the researcher and interviewee agreed to phone conversations. When working by phone, Seidman (2019) emphasizes the need to communicate to participants the importance of conducting the interview and to express a genuine interest in them. To address this concern, the researcher explicitly communicated to participants how their responses would inform the research. The investigator also explained to interviewees that their survey responses indicated they brought a unique perspective that would better inform the study and were intentionally sought out for these reasons. By intentionally emphasizing the value and importance of participant responses, the researcher hoped to minimize the utilitarian nature of the relationship (Seidman, 2019).

According to Seidman (2019), “to work most reliably with the words of the participants, the researcher has to transform those spoken words into a written text to study (p. 123).” The primary method for creating written text from interviews is to record and transcribe the questions and responses. For this study, the researcher recorded questions and responses by selecting the phone’s speaker function, allowing the device to project the participants’ voices loudly and clearly, and recording the audio using the Microsoft Voice Recorder application on the computer. Each interview was transcribed

by a third-party transcription service (Rev.com, San Francisco, CA, USA). Recordings and notes were unidentified except for coding known only to the researcher to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Interview recordings transcribed responses verbatim. After transcriptions of the interviews were secured, the researcher conducted a member check with each principal to ensure the validity of their statements.

Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2012). Member checks are necessary to ensure the validity of the findings and interpretations gathered in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). Member checks help give ownership to the participants and help the researcher gain insight into the situation and the mindsets of the participants. The researcher used two types of member checks. The first member check occurred following the transcription of the interview. Each principal had the opportunity to read the transcription of their own interview and make any corrections, clarifications, or revisions they felt were necessary. This member check ensured that the data the researcher analyzed and interpreted accurately reflected the intent of each principal. There were no revisions made by the participants in the first member check. The second member check occurred during the data analysis process and is discussed further in the Data Analysis section found later in the study.

After the principals verified the accuracy of the interview transcription data, the researcher sought to triangulate their statements with documents illustrating the enabling and hindering district practices they discussed. Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, different types of data and/or different methods for collecting data (Creswell, 2012). The researcher provided suggestions and

examples of potential artifacts participants could produce to illustrate district structures. This was done to expand the principals' understandings of what types of artifacts would be useful to the study. Despite researcher requests and suggestions, principals participating in the case study did not provide documents or other artifacts for analysis. In collecting the interview data for further analysis, the researcher utilized qualitative research strategies designed to increase the validity and reliability of the data.

Trustworthiness

A primary concern of researchers is to produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998). In educational research it is important that researchers and readers are confident in how the research was conducted and the results of the study. In case study research confidence in the findings comes from providing enough detail and depiction of the topic that the researcher's conclusions drawn from the analysis make sense to the reader (Merriam, 1998). Validity and reliability concerns are addressed through careful attention to a study's conceptualization and the methods for data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Merriam, 1998).

Internal Validity

Internal validity addresses concerns that the research findings match reality. Merriam (1998) and Creswell and Poth (2018) highlight multiple procedures a qualitative researcher can implement to validate their study findings. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that a researcher utilize at least two strategies when conducting research. For this study, the investigator implemented three procedures: clarifying researcher bias, triangulating data, and member checking. The researcher selected these three procedures because of their ease of implementation and cost-effectiveness.

When clarifying researcher bias, the investigator discloses their understandings about the biases, values, and experiences they bring to the study so the reader can understand the perspective from which they conduct the inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Case study research requires the investigator to have a critical presence in the context of occurrence. Previous experiences, prejudices, and orientations shape decisions around data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998). The researcher clarified his assumptions, professional experiences, and theoretical orientations at the outset of the study under the Researcher Role section found later in this chapter.

Triangulation uses multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings and corroborate evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998). This process generally involves collecting and analyzing evidence from different sources to uncover themes or perspectives. For this study, the researcher triangulated interview transcripts from two participants. The triangulation process uncovered hindering and enabling district practices and furthered the researchers' understanding of how those practices influenced the work of the principals.

Member checking is the process of seeking participant feedback in the data collection and analysis phases of the study. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe member checking as soliciting participant views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. The researcher conducted two member checks during this study. In the first member check principal interviewees had the chance to review their interview transcripts and clarify or correct any inaccuracies. This first member check ensured that the transcripts the investigator analyzed accurately reflected the communications of the

interviewees. For the second member check, participants received the findings and interpretations drawn from the researcher's analysis of the evidence. This step in the process allowed Principal One and Principal Two to review the enabling and hindering district structures identified by the researcher. It also allowed both principals the opportunity to confirm the way the identified district structures influenced their work. This member check served to find agreement from the participants that the researcher's interpretation of the data accurately reflected their perceptions and experiences. The member checking, triangulation, and statement of researcher bias, all worked to enhance the internal validity of the study.

Reliability

Reliability in a broad sense is the extent to which research findings can be replicated over multiple attempts. As it relates to instrumentation, Creswell and Poth (2018) posit that reliability of qualitative research can be enhanced if the researcher uses quality devices to obtain accurate recordings and verbatim transcriptions. For this study, the researcher recorded phone interviews using the Microsoft Voice Recorder application. Recordings were then transcribed by a third-party transcription service (Rev.com, San Francisco, CA, USA). Additional reliability can be achieved using computer programs to assist in recording and analyzing data. The researcher conducted coding and analysis using NVIVO software. This computer assisted qualitative data analysis software aided the researcher in producing an accurate and transparent picture of the data and provided an audit of the data analysis process. The researcher's use of computer assisted software enhanced to the reliability of the study.

Reliability is problematic in educational research because human behavior is never static (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative researchers seek to describe and explain the world as their study participants experience it. Because there are likely to be a variety of interpretations of the same experience, repeated measures will not establish reliability in the traditional sense (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that in qualitative research, reliability should be thought of more as dependability or consistency. The researcher should be less concerned about achieving the same results across multiple measures, and instead more focused on having outsiders agree that, considering the evidence gathered, the finding and conclusions make sense (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The issue is not whether the findings will be repeated, but whether the results are consistent with the data collected. Merriam (1998) suggests using triangulation, a reflexivity statement and an audit trail to enhance the dependability of results. The researcher conducted two interviews using the same protocol allowing for the triangulation of responses. The researcher included a reflexivity statement under the Researcher's Role section found later in the document. The investigator's interests, biases and emotions may interfere with analysis and interpretations of the interview transcript. Seidman (2019) recommends researchers identify and examine their interest in a subject to ensure it is not infused with anger or prejudice. A reflexivity statement raises the researcher's consciousness of their bias with the hopes of mitigating its influence on the analysis and interpretation of results, leading to more reliable conclusions. The use of NVIVO software to code transcripts and artifacts produces an audit trail documenting the coding process for others to authenticate the findings. The researcher's reflexivity statement, the triangulation of data, and the audit trial procedures, along with the use of

quality recording and data analysis software, enhanced the reliability and dependability of the study.

External Validity

External validity refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be generalized to other situations (Merriam, 1998). Like reliability, the concept of generalizability, in the traditional sense, is problematic when applied to qualitative research. Generalizing findings from large samples to the individual level does little to explain the performance of the individual. The reason for selecting small, non-random samples in qualitative research is because the researcher wishes to understand the particulars of a case, not what is generally true of many (Merriam, 1998). In case study research, issues of external validity typically focus on whether it is possible to generalize findings from a single case, and in what way? Stake (1995) posits that external validity in case study research is best understood through the concept of naturalistic generalization. Naturalistic generalization is predicated on the idea that people draw on intuition, knowledge and experience to find patterns and understandings (Stake, 1995). To engage in the process of naturalistic generalizations, the researcher provides a full description of the case, and the reader recognizes the similarities and understandings that are generalizable to their own experiences. These generalizations do not predict an individual's behavior, but rather are used as guides to future actions (Merriam, 1998). The researcher detailed the experiences of Principal One and Principal Two interacting with their district bureaucracies. The goal of the rich, descriptions and analyses of these interactions was to provide ample context for the reader to determine what from the case was applicable to their own situation. To increase the likelihood that the findings will be

generalized by the reader through the process of naturalistic generalization, the researcher included strategies to strengthen external validity.

Merriam (1998) identified three strategies for enhancing the external validity of case study research. Studying multiple cases, describing the typicality of the case, and providing rich descriptions of the cases, all strengthen the external validity of the research. Merriam (1998) states that studying multiple cases, especially those chosen to demonstrate the maximum variation of the phenomena under study, allows the reader to generalize findings to a wider range of experiences. The researcher designed this study as a collective case study featuring two principals with opposing views of their district bureaucracy. In this study the researcher chose Principal One because of their negative perceptions of the district, and Principal Two was chosen for their positive views of the district. The researcher purposefully featured opposing perspectives, so that practitioners reading the study would find commonalities in one or both cases to guide future practice.

Describing the typicality of the case is another strategy to improve external validity (Merriam, 1998). By comparing the cases under study to other individuals in the same group, and describing how typical or atypical they appear, the researcher is enabling the reader to identify similarities between their own situation and those under study. The descriptions of Principal One and Principal Two under the Participant section of this chapter provide demographic data, school statistics and a summary of their responses to the EDS form. This information allows the reader to identify with the cases at the individual and school level as well as gain insight into their perspective toward their school district.

Rich descriptions of the case should provide enough evidence and detail so the reader is able to determine how closely their situation matches the research situation, and therefore whether the findings can be transferred (Merriam, 1998). Through interviews and survey responses, the researcher provided thorough descriptions of the district interactions experienced by Principal One and Principal Two. In detailing the experiences of the principals under study the goal of the investigator is to provide the user of the study with enough information to find similarities and patterns in the study that can be applied to their own professional experiences. The researcher utilized these procedures to heighten the external validity of the findings.

Research Ethics

In planning and designing a qualitative study, investigators must consider issues that might surface during the research process and plan to address them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher considered the ethical issues during each phase of the study. Before any data collection, the researcher designed the study in consultation with his doctoral advisor and received approval from the Institutional Review Board committee of St. John's University. He sought and received permission to modify and use the Enabling School Structure form from its author, Dr. Wayne Hoy (See Appendix D).

With institutional approval and proper permissions in place, the researcher prepared for the data collection phase. Before data collection can begin, investigators should disclose the purpose of the study to potential participants, refrain from pressuring them into participation, and obtain consent (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants in the quantitative phase of the study who completed the EDS Survey had the opportunity to be considered for the qualitative research phase. Before signing up, survey respondents

read a statement explaining the purpose of the qualitative research and what they could expect if chosen to take part. The researcher emailed the survey, and responses were anonymous, there was no pressure to continue. After choosing a principal for the qualitative portion of the study, the researcher obtained their written, informed consent to participate. The investigator emphasized confidentiality and anonymity, and the voluntariness of participant involvement. Case study consent forms can be found in Appendix F.

When collecting the data, the researcher obtained additional consent before each interview to audio record the conversation. The interviews began with a statement of confidentiality with the provision for non-participation or withdrawal from participation at any time. Once transcribed, persons' names and any other potentially identifying information such as employers and geographic locations were redacted or changed in the interview transcripts. Any documents and transcripts were saved on a password protected computer in the home of the researcher. The researcher sought to report the findings accurately and in-line with the intentions of the participants. Member checks were used not only for purposes of validity, but also for accuracy in the description and interpretation of the participant perceptions. This researcher engaged in self-examination at all stages of the research to eliminate research bias (Merriam, 1988). With the evidence gathered from the interviews, the researcher conducted a thorough data analysis to identify and describe district policies, practices, and behaviors and their influence on the role of the principal.

Data Analysis Approach

Data analysis is a process of finding meaning out of data through consolidating, reducing and interpreting what has been witnessed, recorded, and transcribed (Merriam, 1998). Analysis is an iterative process requiring the researcher to revisit data, abstract concepts, interpretations, and descriptions (Merriam, 1998). It is important to recognize and acknowledge that in this stage of research process the investigator is judging what is significant in the transcript (Seidman, 2019). In this study, the researcher judged participant experiences with district behaviors rules and structures to be significant. The interest in these items arose from the research topic (Seidman, 2019).

One form of analysis common to case study research is the constant comparative method. This method requires the researcher to identify incidents, events, and activities and constantly compare them to an emerging category to further develop the category (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher utilized the constant comparative method to analyze interview transcripts and develop the categories of enabling and hindering district practices. The investigator began by reading and coding transcripts using the In vivo approach. This initial round of analysis highlighted important encounters the participants had with district practices. The coding scheme evolved as the data collection indicated (Merriam, 1998).

The researcher coded the interview transcripts using the In vivo coding method. Saldana (2015) describes In Vivo coding as an approach in which the researcher uses codes derived from the words of the participants themselves. The researcher chose In vivo coding for this study because the method is applicable to virtually all qualitative studies, is suitable for beginner researchers, and honors the voice of the participants

(Saldaña, 2015). Saldana (2015) recommends In vivo coding as it is more likely to capture the meanings inherent in people experiences. Because the researcher sought to learn about enabling and hindering district practices through the experiences of Principal One and Principal Two, In vivo coding seemed an appropriate method.

The researcher utilized the standardized open-ended interview approach when questioning participants about their experiences with district practices. While Seidman (2019) advocated for a more flexible interview structure, this format did align with their method for sharing interview data. Seidman (2019) proposes sharing data by grouping similar individual passages into categories and then studying them for thematic connections within and among them. The standardized interview approach facilitated Seidman's method for sharing data because it was possible to locate each respondent's answer to the same question rather quickly and organize questions and answers that were similar. Since the focus of the interviews was tightly fixed on the bureaucracies of the school districts, the standardized open-ended interview was both efficient and appropriate.

The design of a multiple case study requires an additional level of analysis. Because data are collected and analyzed from separate cases, the researcher usually conducts a within-case analysis and a cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). This is similar to Seidman's method in which interview texts are studied for thematic connections within and among transcripts. For within-case analysis the researcher focuses on analyzing each situation individually learning about the contextual variables that might influence the case. In this study, the researcher first analyzed the transcript from Principal One before analyzing the transcript from Principal Two. The goal was to develop an in-depth

understanding of each district-principal relationship in its own, separate context before moving into the next level of analysis, cross-case analysis.

Cross-case analysis is an inductive, qualitative approach to collective case studies that seeks to build explanations across cases (Merriam, 1998). In a cross-case analysis the researcher is tasked with identifying processes and outcomes found across cases, yet still account for the unique settings within which these outcomes occur. Understanding the patterns of variables across cases and within cases leads to more nuanced descriptions and powerful explanations (Merriam, 1998). Seidman (2019) advises the researcher utilize a similar process when analyzing transcripts. Before organizing the data into larger themes, the researcher should consider how to label interesting passages. As passages are coded in one transcript, the researcher may find subsequent transcripts connect to the original codes or require additional labels (Seidman, 2019). The researcher conducted a cross-case analysis between the experiences described by Principal One and Principal Two. This approach to the data analysis process allowed the researcher to uncover the uniqueness and commonalities of the principal's experiences in working with district offices. Within case and cross-case analysis allowed the investigator to identify specific hindering and enabling district practices to answer RQ2. To answer RQ3, the investigator conducted a second cycle of coding.

Second cycle coding methods are utilized in research to group the initial coding summaries into a smaller number of themes, concepts or categories (Saldaña, 2015). There are various forms of second cycle coding methods in qualitative research. The investigator conducted second cycle coding utilizing focused coding method. Focused coding typically follows initial coding methods such as In vivo (Saldaña, 2015). In the

focused coding method, the investigator searches for the most significant codes to develop the most salient categories in the data (Saldaña, 2015). Seidman (2019) advocates for a similar process to develop themes from the data. In Seidman's process the researcher rereads the coded transcripts and organizes important passages into themes. The development of the themes is an intuitive process in which the researcher groups passages detailing participant experiences that connect to each other as well as those of other participants (Seidman, 2019). Seidman (2019) stresses that during this process the researcher does not organize categories into preconceived themes, but rather allows for the themes to develop from the grouped passages. In this study, the categories developed from the reorganization and categorization of district practices. The researcher organized principal identified hindering and enabling practices into larger themes. The larger themes reflected the similarities among specific district practices. For example, the researcher categorized several district practices that facilitated communication from principal to the superintendent under the theme Seek Principal Input. The focused coding method (Saldaña, 2015) and Seidman's process for organizing coded passages (2019), guided the researcher in creating larger themes that became major components of the study write up. The researcher used the larger themes to answer RQ3.

The use of the constant comparative methodology for data analysis, in addition to the within-case and cross-case approaches, as well as focused coding, guided the researcher in constructing meaning from the qualitative data. Seidman's (2019) research on qualitative interviewing further strengthened the analysis process by specifying how the coding and theme creation applied to interview data. The data analysis process calls upon the investigator's intuitive and analytical strengths. The data analysis process is not

marked by rigid procedures for analysis and interpretation (Merriam, 1998). Such freedom of choice in collecting, analyzing and interpreting evidence means a study is susceptible to researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An important aspect of qualitative research is for the investigator to examine their own beliefs and past experiences and consider how they might influence research.

Researcher Role

In relation to qualitative research, the issue of bias must be addressed to promote the ideal of trustworthiness. Qualitative researchers acknowledge that the writing of the research influences the author of a study, the readers, and the participants under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Being a reflexive writer is about acknowledging one's role in the research. The qualitative researcher is part of the research process, and their prior experiences, assumptions and beliefs influence the research process. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest reflexivity has two parts. First the researcher should reflect upon their involvement with the phenomena being explored, relaying past personal and professional experiences. Next the researcher should discuss how those past experiences may influence their interpretation of the phenomena under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For this study, the primary researcher is a 35-year-old, white male who is working toward a Doctor of Education in administrative and instructional leadership. They are currently working as an assistant principal in a New York City public school. The school serves about 450 students in grades 3 to 8 with 85% of the student body qualifying for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch. 95% of the student population identifies as Black or Hispanic. The researcher is interested in continuing to advance their career and intends to pursue principal and district level positions in the future. Their desire to become a

principal and district level administrator motivated them to pursue a doctorate and study the relationship between the principal and district offices. Having worked as an educator and administrator in low-income communities of color for the past nine years the researcher has witnessed first-hand the challenges facing students, parents, teachers, and administrators in these schools. The researcher holds the belief that all schools have the potential to be positive, adaptive institutions that challenge student thinking through rigorous academics and meet the changing needs of the local community. To become these positive, adaptable community institutions the researcher believes schools need strong principal leadership and supportive districts. However, the belief exists in that the potential for supportive, principal centered districts is not often realized. For example, the researcher has worked in settings where the district seems to function as check to hold principals accountable to benchmarks and deadlines, instead of as a support for school improvement. This experience has led to the perception that some district bureaucracies exhibit behavior, policies, and practices that hinder the work of principals. The researcher also recognizes that there are principals who find district structures to be helpful and supportive of their work. The interplay between the role of the principal in school improvement efforts and the potential for the district to act as an enabling or hindering factor intrigued the researcher and became the focus of this study.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to generate descriptions of behaviors, rules, and structures of the district system and the bureaucrats/administrators within the districts that enable and hinder the efforts of school principals to perform their administrative duties. Based on the quantitative portion of this research, it has been established that principals

can differentiate between behaviors, rules, and structures that are enabling and those which are hindering.

The qualitative portion of this study, the collective case study, was hypothesis-generating (Merriam, 1998). The behaviors, rules, and structures identified in the following chapters should be considered starting points or guidelines for the practitioner who then tests them in practice. Although there will not be complete consensus as to whether all the identified behaviors, rules, and structures are enabling or hindering, general agreements can serve as guidelines for the district's bureaucrats/administrators. Because qualitative research often focuses on human behavior, which is ever changing, the findings and descriptions of this study are not set-in stone nor are they best practice in all districts. Truth is subject to the interpretation and consensus among informed people (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic generalization is predicated on the idea that people draw on intuition, knowledge and experience to find patterns and understandings (Stake, 1995). So, descriptions from this study will need to be combined with unique aspects of each educational situation to determine the appropriate use of the findings. The following chapter will communicate the findings from the relevant data analysis to answer the research questions. The descriptions generated will provide practitioners with guidelines to improve the workings of district bureaucracies.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter 4 provided a descriptive and analytical analysis of the data collected through the research procedures outlined in Chapter 3. The study's sequential, explanatory, mixed methods drove the methodological decisions regarding data collection and analysis. The researcher designed the investigation to examine the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent are district bureaucracies perceived as hindering or enabling by principals?
- 2) What behaviors, rules, and structures can be identified and described by principals as hindering as opposed to enabling?
- 3) How do hindering and enabling behaviors, rules, and structures of a district influence the work of school principals?

Chapter 4 is organized into three parts, following the order of study's three research questions. In part one, the investigator addressed RQ1 by presenting the results of the Enabling District Structure (EDS) survey. In part two, RQ2 was answered through the identification of hindering and enabling district behaviors, rules, and structures gleaned via interview data gathered in the collective case study. Interview data were again utilized to answer RQ3, by explaining how the enabling and hindering aspects of the district, identified in RQ2, influenced the work of principals. The reporting of the quantitative and qualitative data revealed the substantial effect school district bureaucracies have on the efforts and perceptions of building principals. In chapter 5, the researcher considers how the findings in chapter 4 inform the study's original research

questions. Additionally, the findings in chapter 4 will be examined to see how they fit within the context of the recent literature, as well as their implications for future research and practice.

Results

Research Question 1

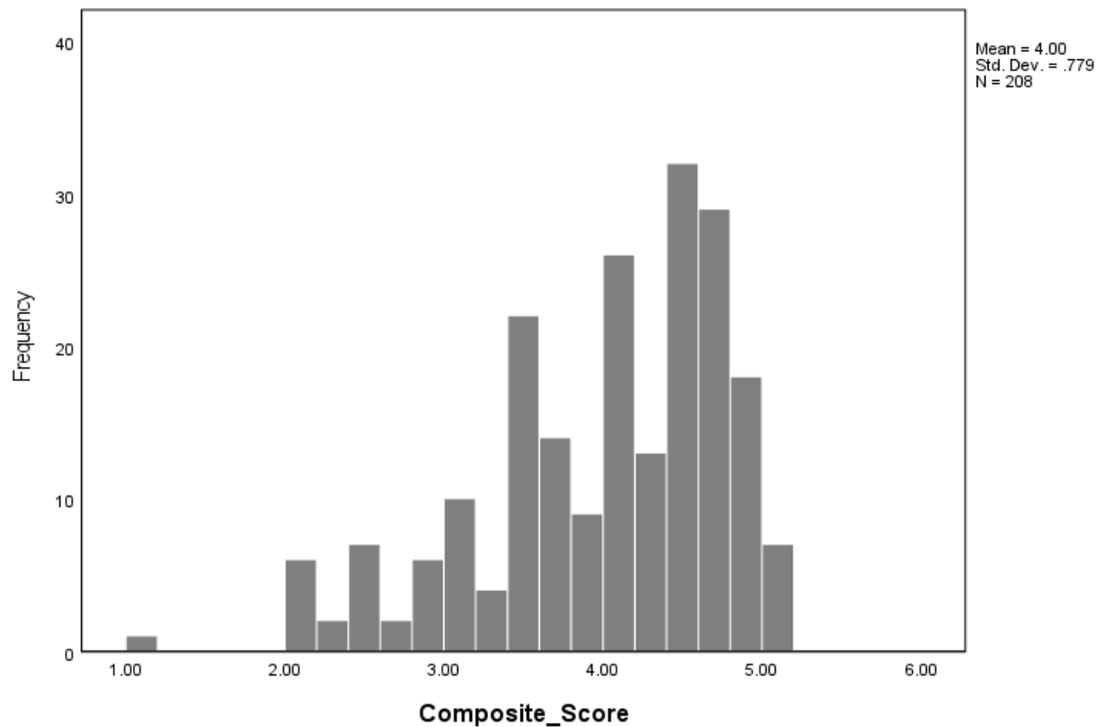
The researcher utilized survey research design to investigate the extent to which principals perceived their district bureaucracies as hindering and enabling their work. Two hundred forty-four school principals in NYS school districts completed the EDS survey. To ensure the reliability of the dataset, the researcher conducted two statistical tests. The new data were analyzed using a principal-axis factor analysis and a reliability test. Consistent with the findings from Hoy and Sweetland's (2001) analysis of data collected from the Enabling School Structure (ESS) form, the EDS dataset indicated a one-factor solution with the single factor explaining 62% of the variance. The principal axis factor analysis revealed all 12 items on the EDS form had strong factor loadings ranging from .59 to .84. The reliability test returned an alpha coefficient of .94 indicating high internal consistency among items on the EDS form. This showed the researcher that the data from the EDS survey sample had high reliability and a factor structure similar to Hoy and Sweetland's ESS datasets.

Before conducting an item-by-item analysis of the EDS survey results the researcher displayed the overall average principal rating in a histogram as seen below in Figure 1. In Figure 1, the histogram of principal responses to the EDS survey showed overall ratings skewed to the left. The distribution has a mean of 4.0 and a standard deviation of .78. For this dataset, the lowest average rating a district received was 1.0 and

the highest average score was 5.0. There was an unusually low average score from one of the respondents. In this particular case, the principal gave the lowest ratings possible resulting in a mean score of 1.0 indicating they Always encountered hindering district practices. This score is an outlier and further skews the distribution of scores to the left.

Figure 1

Composite ratings of principal responses to the EDS survey.



The researcher analyzed the data using SPSS and presented the results in Table 6 below. The investigator further analyzed participant responses to each statement with a focus on the mean and standard deviation. Interpretation of the data depends on the positive or negative phrasing of the survey statement.

In considering RQ1, the investigator predicted school leaders would perceive the school district bureaucracy to be enabling their work. The researcher designed this study's

quantitative phase to rate the frequency principals encounter hindering and enabling behaviors, rules, and structures within NYS school districts.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of the EDS Survey Data

EDS Survey Items	N		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
Administrative rules enable authentic communication	239	5	4.14	1.01
In this district red tape is a problem	235	9	3.55	.99
The administrative hierarchy enables principals	237	7	4.05	.92
The administrative hierarchy obstructs student achievement	236	8	4.28	.98
Administrative rules help rather than hinder	239	5	3.63	1.02
Administrative hierarchy facilitates the mission of the district	233	11	3.94	1.00
Administrative rules are guides to solutions rather than rigid procedures	237	7	3.72	.99
Administrative rules are used to punish principals	238	6	4.45	.91
Administrative hierarchy obstructs innovation	239	5	3.92	1.05
Administrative rules are substitutes for professional judgment	237	7	4.04	.98
Authority of superintendent used to undermine principals	240	4	4.28	1.03
Administrators use their authority to enable principals	236	8	3.87	1.01
Average	208	0	4.0	.99

*Averages based on the 208 surveys returned with all items completed.

Items 2-13 of the survey measured principal perceptions of their district. The EDS form is a balanced measure with six positive loading enabling items and six negative

loading hindering items. The positive loading statements described the centralization (hierarchy) and formalization (rules) of the district bureaucracy in a positive tone. The more frequently the respondent perceived the structures to enable their work, the more positively weighted the score. The Likert-type scale for survey statements were Always, Fairly Often, Sometimes, Once in a While, Never. For the positive loading statements, a structure that “Always” enabled the participant, was scored a five while a structure that “Never” enabled was scored a one. For negative loading statements, the responses were reverse scored. Negative loading statements referred to the hindering nature of a district’s formalization and centralization. The more frequently the coercive aspects of the rules and hierarchy hindered the participants' work, the lower the score. An aspect of the district’s formalization or centralization that “Always” hindered a respondent scored a one, where a structure that “Never” hindered a participant scored a five. Using this scoring structure, an item with a mean score of below 3.0 implied that the principals perceived that aspect of the district rules or hierarchy to be hindering, while mean scores at or above 3.0 implied that the participating principals found it enabling (Hoy, 2003b).

In an analysis of elementary schools, Hoy and Kupersmith (1984) found principal authenticity to be strongly correlated with faculty trust. They found that authentic communication in the principal-district relationship is characteristic of an enabling bureaucracy and leads to greater levels of trust (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1984). In item one of the EDS form, the researcher measured the frequency at which New York state principals encountered district rules that enabled authentic communication. The statement was positive because it implied that the rules facilitated genuine, beneficial communication. The mean score of 4.14 among 239 responses implied principals frequently found the

administrative rules of their district enabled authentic communication. The standard deviation of 1.01 indicated general agreement among respondents.

Adler and Borys (1996) conceptualized formalization in organizations as being enabling or coercive in nature. Coercive formalization is characterized by bureaucratic rules and procedures designed to force compliance and compel effort. Item two assessed the nature of a district's bureaucratic rules and procedures, asking participants the frequency district red tape hindered their work. The statement in item two was negative and was therefore reversed scored. A score at or above 3.00 means the principal did not encounter this coercive structure often. Therefore, the mean of 3.55 implied principals generally did not find district red tape to be problematic. Although the mean score indicated a more enabling perception of district rules, a score of 3.55 is close to the neutral score of 3.0, indicating that a meaningful number of principals found district red tape to be an issue at least some of the time. The standard deviation of 0.99 implied that there was relative agreement among the survey participants.

Item three of the EDS form centered on the notion, posited by Hoy and Sweetland (2001), that enabling centralization is adaptable with hierarchical structures designed to facilitate cooperation. In an enabling district bureaucracy, administrators use their power and authority to support principals and design structures that facilitate the work. Item three assessed how often the administrative hierarchy of the district enabled the work of principals. The administrative hierarchy in NYS school districts is vertical, beginning with the superintendent and extending down through other district administrators to the school building leader. Responses to item three registered a mean score of 4.05, implying principals found the hierarchy "fairly often" supported their work. Hierarchies that

enabled school principals have been linked to higher levels of job satisfaction and result in a stronger commitment to the organization (Chang et al., 2015). The standard deviation of 0.92 indicated a high level of agreement among school leader responses.

Hindering centralization refers to a hierarchy and administration that impedes subordinates instead of helping them solve problems (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). The fourth item of the survey sought to measure how often the district's hierarchy obstructed student achievement in the school. Because the item was phrased in a negative tone, the responses are reverse scored. This item's responses resulted in a mean of 4.28, showing that school building leaders rarely found the district's hierarchy to impede student achievement. A mean of 4.28 is one of the highest mean scores on the survey signaling principals felt strongly that the administrative hierarchy “Never” obstructed student achievement. Due to the statement's phrasing, the researcher does not assert district hierarchies supported student achievement, only that they did not hinder it. The standard deviation of 0.98 implied a closeness in the responses showing an increased level of agreement.

Adler and Borys (1996), along with Hoy and Sweetland (2001), theorized the hierarchy and rules of a bureaucracy can enable the work of its participants. Item three of the EDS form assessed the rate at which principals found the district hierarchy enabled their work. In item five, the researcher investigated how often district rules helped building leaders. The findings revealed the mean perception score to be 3.63. A mean score of 3.63 suggested respondents generally found district rules helped them in their administrative roles. It is important to note that when considering the district bureaucracy, principals perceived the hierarchy to be more enabling ($M=4.05$) than the

rules ($M=3.63$). School leaders demonstrated general agreement in their views regarding this item as responses registered a standard deviation of 1.02.

Organizational alignment to the mission and goals of an institution is an important component of its success. When the administrative hierarchy assists in pursuing the realization of the district's mission, it enables the principal's work. Hierarchical support of the district mission is important to the principal's success because school leaders are responsible for implementing district priorities at the building level. The researcher, therefore, investigated whether the district hierarchy regularly facilitated the mission of the district. A mean score of 3.94 suggested that "Fairly Often," the district hierarchy assisted in realizing the district mission. The standard deviation of 1.00 inferred respondents had a similar opinion on the role of the hierarchy in realizing the district mission.

The district's administrative rules have the potential to be reliable guides for addressing issues in a school or district bureaucracy. In organizations, employees perceive formalization in a positive manner if it enables them to master their tasks (Adler & Borys, 1996). When employees are confronted with obstacles, enabling formalization provides them with solutions to support their work (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). Along these lines, item seven investigated the extent to which district rules acted as guides to solutions instead of rigid procedures. Participant responses registered a mean score of 3.72, suggesting principals found administrative rules to be important guides to problem-solving. Based on the phrasing of the statement, one could also infer that since the administrative rules are not rigid procedures, principals can adopt customized solutions

and strategies in their schools for better outcomes. The standard deviation of 0.99 revealed a cohesiveness in how principals perceived the rules to be guides to solutions.

Hindering rules and procedures punish subordinates rather than reward productive practices (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). In evaluating district bureaucracies, the investigator sought to uncover the extent to which district administrative rules punished school principals. When rules were viewed as the punishment, research showed hindering formalization as negatively associated with job satisfaction and innovation (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). This negative loading statement produced the highest mean score of 4.45, meaning most principals felt strongly that the district “Never” used administrative rules to punish principals. A standard deviation of 0.91 indicated minimal variation between responses, signaling strong agreement among the participants.

In organizations with a high degree of centralization, decision-making power is concentrated at the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy. High centralization is often viewed as coercive. In coercive administrations, the hierarchy obstructs innovation, and leaders use their authority to control and discipline subordinates (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). The ninth item on the EDS survey was aligned with Hoy and Sweetland’s (2001) finding that hierarchies that controlled professional decisions in a top-down manner obstructed innovation, asking participants how often the administrative hierarchy obstructed innovation. The focus on this aspect of centralization is important because innovation is required to meet school districts' unique and changing needs. The mean of 3.92 indicated principals found the frequency the district hierarchy obstructed innovation to be between “Sometimes” and “Once in a while.” It is encouraging to see that principals did not consider the administrative hierarchy to be a hindrance to improvement. However, it is

important to note that a meaningful number of principals felt the district hierarchy did “Sometimes” obstruct innovation. This could be due to principals in the sample feeling they lacked autonomy, which is concerning because the research shows principals who perceived they lacked autonomy were more likely to leave their position (Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011). The standard deviation of 1.05 implied some divergence of views among the principals regarding the statement.

Item ten investigated how often the district used rules as substitutes for professional judgment of the principal. Formal procedures can be written to standardize the work process, or they can be designed to enable employees to leverage their experience and expertise. In the “enabling type of formalization” (Adler & Borys, 1996, p. 69), the written rules and procedures incorporate lessons learned from past experiences and allow employees to apply their knowledge. The phrasing of item ten suggested that the district bureaucracy's administrative rules hampered principals in applying professional judgment and knowledge. The researcher reverse scored item ten, and the respondents' answers resulted in a mean of 4.04. This result showed principals felt that “Once in a While,” the administrative rules substituted for their professional judgment. The standard deviation of 0.98 meant there was no significant divergence of the responses.

In the NYS public school system hierarchy, district superintendents have authority over the school principals. Hoy and Sweetland (2001) and Sinden (2002) found that some school administrators used the power derived from their position within the hierarchy to manage and discipline teachers. In schools where administrators controlled professional work in a top-down fashion, teachers often resisted the usurpation of power.

The researcher extended the findings from the school level to the district bureaucracy revealing that principals generally found their superintendents used power to enable the work of the principal. Item eleven assessed if superintendents frequently used their authority to undermine principals. Participant responses resulted in a mean score of 4.28, demonstrating that “Once in a While” superintendents used their authority to undermine school leaders. The standard deviation of 1.03 noted some differences in the way the principals responded to the issue.

District administrators can use their authority to hinder and enable the efforts of the school principal. Where the previous item sought to assess if superintendents used hierarchical authority negatively, item twelve measured the frequency at which district administrators utilized authority to enable the school principal's work. Responses to this statement registered a mean of 3.87, revealing that most principals perceived district administrators as enabling their roles as school building leaders. It is of note; principals felt strongly ($M = 4.28$) that superintendents rarely used their authority to undermine them, yet, also perceived district authority enabled their work “Sometimes” or “Fairly Often” ($M=3.87$). The standard deviation of 1.01 indicated agreement in the way the principals responded to the statement.

The researcher designed the quantitative phase of the study to investigate the extent to which principals perceived district bureaucracies to be hindering or enabling their work. An analysis of the survey results revealed an overall trend and varying degrees of enabling district behaviors, rules, and structures. An evaluation of the overall mean scores indicated principals perceived school district bureaucracies to be enabling their work. For all 12 items of the EDS form, principal responses returned mean scores

greater than 3.0, within a range of 3.55 to 4.45. According to the scoring structure of the EDS form, an item with a mean score below 3.0 implied participants perceived that aspect of the district rules or hierarchy to be hindering, while a mean score above 3.0 implied that the participating principals found it to be enabling (Hoy, 2003b). Because the mean scores of participant responses all registered above 3.0, the general trend indicated principals found district bureaucracies to be enabling in nature.

An analysis of the individual items provided greater insight into which survey statements generated the strongest participant responses. Principals soundly rejected the notion that the district directly worked to hinder their efforts. The EDS survey recorded the three highest mean scores in response to negatively loaded statements. Specifically, principals felt that district rules were rarely used to punish principals ($M=4.45$), that the hierarchy rarely obstructed student achievement ($M=4.28$), and that superintendent's authority seldom undermined the principal ($M=4.28$). By contrast, survey statements that generated the lowest mean scores (indicating principals perceived them to be the least enabling) centered on formalization within the bureaucracy. In particular, many principals responded that sometimes, district red tape was a problem ($M=3.55$). The mean score of 3.55, the lowest for all statements, signaled that principals frequently encountered district bureaucratic rules that frustrated their efforts.

Similarly, principals did not enthusiastically support the notion that administrative rules helped rather than hindered ($M=3.63$), nor did they frequently find the district's rules acted as guides to solutions instead of rigid procedures ($M=3.72$). While principals did not find the rules frequently enabled their efforts, respondents perceived the hierarchy as more supportive. School leaders perceived the district hierarchy more frequently

facilitated the district's mission ($M=3.94$) and enabled principals in their roles ($M=4.05$). Furthermore, the school administrators did not consider the hierarchy as an obstruction to innovation ($M=3.92$). The range in mean scores of principal responses to survey statements indicated most principals found all aspects of the bureaucracy enabled their work. The differences in the mean scores to each statement demonstrated the varying degrees to which different aspects of the bureaucracy enabled principals.

Findings from the study's quantitative phase indicated school leaders perceived the overall bureaucracy of the school district organization to enable their work. When comparing the hierarchy and the rules, mean scores indicated principals found the hierarchy to enable their work more frequently.

Qualitative Findings

The researcher designed the qualitative phase of the study to answer RQ2 and RQ3. For RQ2, the investigator sought to identify the behaviors, rules, and structures principals perceived as hindering and enabling their work. For RQ3, the investigator further examined how the identified practices influenced school leaders' efforts. To explore RQ2 and RQ3, the researcher utilized collective case study methodology. The researcher interviewed two principals, one who perceived their district to hinder their efforts and one who perceived the district to enable their work. The investigator recorded and transcribed responses and then conducted two cycles of coding followed by an analysis and interpretation of the data.

Research Question 2

To answer Research Question 2, the investigator first analyzed each principal's interview transcript separately. The analysis involved coding transcripts using

the In vivo method to identify, in the participant’s own words, hindering and enabling district practices. Using the identified practices within each case, the researcher conducted a cross-case analysis to highlight the differences in behaviors, policies, and structures found in enabling and hindering districts. Table 9 below contains the interview questions and the enabling and hindering practices identified in each participant's response. Full interview transcripts can be found in Appendix G (Principal One) and Appendix H (Principal Two) Further analysis of the data presented in Table 9 follows below.

Table 7

Principal identified hindering and enabling district practices

Questions	Enabling Behaviors	Hindering Behaviors
In what ways do the rules in this district enable communication?	1) Keep them informed 2) Open communication	1) Stymied in-person group meetings 2) Unanswered emails
In what ways do the rules in this district enable? And in what ways might they hinder?	1) Courtesy and respect 2) Freedom of discretion 3) Legal protection	1) Informal 'norms' hinder 2) Lied to 3) Say one thing do another 4) Legal authorization required suspensions discipline
In what ways do the rules in this district aid in? And in what ways do they act as red tape and inhibit problem solving?	1) Informal rules 2) Similar work philosophies	1) Played favorites 2) Legal due process 3) Overlap with personal life
In what ways have the rules in this district been used to punish if they are, and in what ways are they used to reward principals?	1) Helpful mentor 2) Support for disciplinary issues (when need)	1) Board assigned mentor 2) Disrespectful of achievements 3) Circumvent principal 4) Investigation without explanation

District administrative rules can be used as substitutes for professional judgment. How are rules used in this way in the district, if that happens?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Flexibility 2) Respect professional experience of others 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Disregard professional experiences of others 2) Legal liability ramifications 3) Safety issues
In what ways does the district's hierarchy enable or hinder principals in doing their jobs?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Decisive leadership 2) Consult principals, Talk it out 3) Team approach 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Board expectation of involvement 2) Hostile environment 3) Lack of support
In what ways does the district's administration facilitate the mission of the district?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Professional development 2) Redesigned and updated 3) Similar philosophies 4) Supportive of 'grunt work 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Toxic tone
In what ways is administrative authority used to enable principals to do their jobs, and in what ways is authority used to undermine principals, if that happens?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Encourages feedback 2) Supports Professional decision 3) Visionary 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Blocks – forces 2) Disrespect 3) Restrain principal support 4) Usurps
In what ways does the administration aid in attaining student achievements, and in what ways might it obstruct achievement?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Revised curriculum student intervention 2) Student-directed support & philosophy 3) Support transient students 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Understaffed student intervention program
In what ways does the administration of this district support and encourage innovation, and in what ways might it obstruct innovation?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Equal voice 2) Positivity Project 3) Sense of strength - mutual respect 4) Support and encourage 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Toxic & unethical
Is there anything else you would like to share?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Open to subordinate feedback 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Say “no” just because 2) Unwilling to listen 3) Focus on money, not instruction 4) Contact leads to overwork

Question 1. *Enabling district administrations aid communications between principals and district administrators. In what ways do the rules in this district enable communication?*

The first interview question elicited four discrete behaviors – two perceived as hindering and two perceived as enabling. Principal One selected “Never” on the Enabling District Structure survey when considering how often rules in the district enabled authentic communication. During the interview, Principal One immediately stated, “I would have to say the rules pretty much disable communication,” and that, “after a while, the building level principals have learned not to see the superintendent as someone who is supportive or helpful.” This initial statement reflected an overall sentiment held by Principal One. Principal One further elaborated, citing two specific district behaviors that disabled communication. When discussing interactions with administrators at district meetings, they revealed that principals would “kind of be shot down” and, as a result, “a lot of people learned not to ask questions.” In another example, Principal One cited the lack of response around important topics. Specifically, Principal One referred to instances where an “email is sent, and an answer needs to be made,” but “more often than not, the emails remain unanswered.” While no specific rules were identified as hindering communication, Principal One repeatedly referenced the district administrators' behavior as an obstacle.

Principal Two found the rules “Always” enabled authentic communication between principals and district administrators. During the interview, Principal Two

explained how both formal and informal rules guided communication. Specifically, the participant referenced expectations that principals in the district “always keep [their] superiors informed of decisions and movements within the district that will reach their level.” Principal Two further elaborated saying, “the unspoken and spoken expectation is that I keep my superiors informed whenever I have those gray decisions.” These statements suggest district leaders acknowledge principals regularly make decisions that have district level implications despite not having clear answers. Understanding this, it seems district personnel recognize the value of communication with the principal. Principal Two further explains, that because the superintendent’s job is to keep the school board informed, they insist on being apprised of any potentially significant situations. Principal Two recalled being questioned by the superintendent about communication when the school leader, “didn't make the call ahead of time to say ‘Hey, this is what's happening.” By holding Principal Two to account for lapses in communication, it suggests the superintendent sought to reinforce to school leaders the importance of principal-district communication.

In addition to the rules and expectations about keeping district administrators informed, the district’s willingness to engage in open conversation with principals enabled authentic communication. For instance, Principal Two described the superintendent as being “open to hav[ing] a discussion and bounce ideas.” They explained that although the organization generally expected that they would “listen and heed [the superintendent's] advice,” school leaders did have freedom to exercise professional discretion. These sentiments seem to indicate that a commitment to open

communication and expectations to keep district administrators informed cultivated a bureaucracy that enabled authentic communication.

Question 2. *Rules can either aid principals in achieving their goals or hinder principals. In what ways do the rules in this district enable? And in what ways might they hinder?*

Interview question 2 assessed how district rules enabled or hindered principals in achieving their goals. The principals experienced three enabling practices and four hindering practices in their school districts. On the EDS survey, item 5 measured how often district rules helped rather than hindered. Principal One noted administrative rules “Never” helped. Principal One elaborated, stating informal norms hindered the work with school district leaders commonly “lying to [principals] and telling [them] what [they] wanted to hear.” Principal One illustrated that the principals in their district often found out later that the administration did not follow through on their previous assurances. Principal One reflected on a time they had been nominated for an award and secured several stakeholder endorsements, including the superintendent. Principal One expected to be considered for the award, but later discovered the award committee would not consider the nomination because the superintendent called the awards committee to remove the endorsement. While Principal One identified lying as a norm that hindered their goals, the response centered on the act of stating claims or giving assurances and then reversing them or not following through. It seems it was not only the lie that generated negative feelings, but the actions that followed to undermine and impede the principal.

Principal Two responded to item 5 of the EDS survey noting that “Fairly Often,” administrative rules in the district helped principals. During the interview, the researcher asked the participant to assess how district rules enabled or hindered the principals in achieving their goals. Principal Two initially focused on the broader influence of the rules in general. The participant referenced the high degree of autonomy, stating, “[the rules] are enabling in that they give me the freedom to have discretion.” The respondent also identified a common thread among rules, which is that colleagues are treated with respect. The expectation of “common courtesy” is present throughout the district.

Following claims about the broader influence of district rules, Principal Two specified how legal guidance rules enabled and hindered the work. In the district, the school board determined principals must consult district lawyers before making significant disciplinary decisions, revealing how this rule hindered principals and restricted autonomy. However, Principal Two also acknowledged that “the rules end up protecting administration” as “situations arise all the time where legalities are called into question.” This suggests that having district lawyers as a resource, while frustrating due to additional time and paperwork, is also perceived to be an advantage.

Participant responses highlight opposing perspectives. In an enabling district, Principal Two appreciates the lack of informal rules and the high degree of autonomy. In the hindering district, Principal One found the informal rules to be coercive. Further analysis of the responses revealed Principal Two referenced the autonomy enjoyed as the principal, where Principal One seemed to feel more rules were needed to manage the superintendent.

Question 3. *Rules may either serve as guides to problem solutions or be rigid barriers to problem solving. In what ways do the rules in this district aid in? And in what ways do they act as red tape and inhibit problem solving?*

Bureaucratic rules can be overly rigid and inhibit problem solving, or they can function as guides to solutions. Question 3 combined two items on the EDS form into one question to assess how district rules can be facilitative and obstructive in nature. Item two of the EDS form measured how often district red tape was a problem, while item seven recorded how often rules acted as guides to solutions. Interviewees identified two enabling behaviors and three hindering behaviors in their responses. Principal One noted that red tape was “Always” a problem and that rules “Never” acted as guides to solutions. Unsurprisingly, when responding to question three in the interview phase, Principal One described district rules as inhibiting the work. Principal One cited instances when it seemed the district approved funding proposals based on how well-liked the principal was among the central office staff. They explained that such actions enhanced the level of mistrust among the administrators. Applying bureaucratic rules unfairly among school leaders seemed to have a deleterious effect on trust and hindered principals in their role.

Principal Two gave the district the highest possible score on all items measured in the EDS survey except for the two items reflected in question 3 of the interview. According to participant’s responses, the school leader encountered district red tape “Once in a While” and found district rules “Fairly Often,” acted as guides to solutions. When responding to the third interview question, Principal Two described both enabling and hindering aspects of the same district practices. First, the school leader appreciated having a similar work ethic to the superintendent. A strong work ethic meant district

leaders did not need to formalize rules around principal work completion. Principal Two embraced the lack of formal rules because it provided flexibility in executing the role. However, Principal Two also explained how the ambiguity surrounding work hours and expectations resulted in extremely long hours, which they found to be “both liberating and confining.” Principal Two found work and life would overlap due to the lack of written rules and the position's heavy workload. There was no formal rule that required the long hours, but more of an expectation that the work gets done.

Additionally, the school leader encountered district red tape for routine disciplinary issues. Specifically, Principal Two recalled frustration around the amount of paperwork required by district lawyers. School leaders in the district, “have to call legal on every correspondence or call that deals with suspension matters, which is unusual.” This district rule impeded Principal Two’s ability to respond swiftly to disciplinary matters. For Principal Two, the rules could be both enabling and hindering depending on the type of guidance they provided.

Question 4. *Rules may be used to punish or reward principals. On what ways have the rules in this district been used to punish if they are, and in what ways are they used to reward principals?*

Responses to question 4 of the interview protocol uncovered four hindering practices and two enabling practices. Item 8 of the Enabling District Structure form asked principals how often the administrative rules punished principals. In Principal One’s experience, district rules “Always” punished the principal. To support this position, Principal One recalled when the superintendent publicly praised them for earning a doctorate but privately would continually refer to them as “miss.” Principal One

described the superintendent's actions as punishing and sad, feeling it revealed “issues of power behind the scenes.” In another example, Principal One described instances where district administrators would circumvent the principal by meeting “with a team of teachers” without notifying the school leader. School administrators would then hear from teachers about district plans to “roll-out a new curriculum.” The lack of transparency and being “kept out of the process” frustrated principals. Principal One did not highlight explicit rules used to punish principals but referred to experiences that felt punishing and undermining authority.

Participants responded to items on the EDS form rating how often the district's administrative rules punished principals. According to Principal Two, the district rules “Never” punished principals. However, during the interview, Principal Two first recalled an experience when the district assigned a mentor in their third year as principal. Although the school board felt Principal Two would benefit and did not intend for it to be a punishment, the additional support required a 30 to 40-hour commitment across the year. This is a long duration of time considering the demands of the position. That the school board assigned the mentor in Principal Two’s third year without much explanation led the participant to perceive such action as a punishment. It is important to note, however, Principal Two did appreciate their mentor’s guidance and found the feedback “assisted in a lot of ways.”

In another example, Principal Two described feeling punished during a disciplinary dispute with a teacher. In that instance, the district hired an outside lawyer to investigate the teacher’s claims instead of conducting an internal review. The participant

understood the need to “create objectivity,” but “felt weird that [they] were put in that situation when [they] kept everybody informed...every step of the way.”

Beyond those specific instances where the participant felt punished, Principal Two reported “that the rules protect and support [...] on a day-to-day basis” and provide guidance and backing when “dealing with an irate parent or a challenging teacher or a student disciplinary situation.” Interestingly, both interviewees recalled punishing situations when responding to this questions. Despite Principal Two responding that district rules never punished principals on the EDS survey, the interview response focused on various instances of punishment. In both interviews, neither principal recalled district rules that rewarded principals.

Question 5. *District administrative rules can be used as substitutes for professional judgment. How are rules used in this way in the district, if that happens?*

When Adler and Borys (1996) theorized about enabling formalization, they characterized it as rules that built upon best practices and allowed employees to utilize their expertise in their jobs. The EDS form assessed the extent to which participants perceived there to be enabling formalization in their district bureaucracy. Item 10 recorded how frequently principals found the rules of their district to be substitutes for professional judgment. Principal One perceived the rules as “Always” being used as substitutes for professional judgment. In the interview, Principal One described instances where an assistant superintendent in the district gave guidance that was not only counterintuitive to maintaining a safe environment for the students but also exposed the school to legal liabilities. When Principal One confronted the assistant superintendent on these two issues, the assistant superintendent’s “professional judgment was that it wasn’t

wrong.” Principal One noted times when district administrators overruled their professional judgment regarding special education issues, even though Principal One formerly held the position of Director of Special Education in the school district. As an experienced administrator at the district and school level, Principal One’s feelings of frustration centered on occasions when they had to defer to the professional judgment of a district administrator not because it was the best guidance, but because district personnel were “in a higher-ranking power.” Principal One became even more frustrated when the consequences of the district rules resulted in “staff getting hurt” and “kids not getting services that they need.” Principal One explained that they felt helpless in those instances “because [the superintendent’s] professional judgment overrules mine; it overrules everyone else’s. And that’s that.”

According to Principal Two, district rules are “Never” substituted for professional judgment. The participant supported this definitive response in the interview phase stating, “I don’t think there’s ever a situation...where rules are followed for their own sake.” District flexibility in the decision-making process enabled the work of principals. Principal Two found that when the building and district administrators encounter uncertainty, they engaged in “productive discussions” rather than adhering to a rule simply because it exists. Additionally, “if there is a rule that’s antiquated or needs readjustment [principals are] given full say.”

For example, Principal Two recalled being appointed “the lead administrator for the rewriting of the district code of conduct.” This responsibility recognized principals as experts in understanding the impact of these rules at the school level. Even when working with district/central office rules, there was never a situation “where something was done,

and we just had to follow it because that was the rule.” Principal Two regularly encountered and worked within the rules of the district bureaucracy. However, the district’s respect for a principal’s professional expertise and district administrators’ flexibility to re-examine the rules enabled Principal Two’s school improvement efforts.

Question 6. *The administrative hierarchy may be used to enable principals to do their jobs, or to hinder principals in doing their jobs. In what ways does this district's hierarchy enable or hinder principals in doing their jobs?*

In responding to item 3 on the Enabling District Structure form, Principal One answered that the administrative hierarchy in the district “Never” enabled principals to do their job. When asked to elaborate in the interview portion, Principal One identified situations where district administrators refused to support principals even when they asked for help. In one instance, a principal asked to delay a meeting with angry parents, but the superintendent refused. The superintendent forced the principal to sit in on a meeting with angry parents who insulted and degraded the school building administrator. The situation created a hostile work environment that hindered the principal’s efforts.

Principal Two recorded that the administrative hierarchy in the district “Always” enabled principals to do their job. When the researcher asked the participant to elaborate how the district enabled principals, they cited a high degree of mutual respect among administrators, the collaborative nature of the decision-making process, and the superintendent’s decisive decision making. Principal Two acknowledged the occasional top-down nature of the hierarchy “where the superintendent makes the final decision,” but also stated that such decisions were “almost always [made] in consultation with the other administrators in the district.” The participant welcomed being consulted regarding

important decisions and respected the district's final decision. At no time did the participant report feeling as though the "hierarchy had been used to somehow squash [their] ability to do [their] job on the building level."

Principal Two did mention that the hierarchy could be problematic when the superintendent inserted himself into school-level issues. For example, when the superintendent sat in on a meeting between a principal and parents, parents directed their questions and comments toward the superintendent, seemingly bypassing the principal's authority. Principal Two recognized the superintendent was not "overstepping his hierarchy," but that it "had the unfortunate consequence of making it look like [they weren't] on board with everything that was happening, when in fact [they] had discussions every step of the way." Such actions appeared to undermine the authority of the principal. Both Principal One and Principal Two noted how the superintendent's interjection into school level issues created challenges, specifically, referencing situations involving parents. This may suggest principals are particularly concerned about the appearance of authority when dealing with parents.

Question 7. *District administrators are concerned with the mission of the district.*

In what ways does the district administration facilitate the mission of the district?

Participant responses to interview question seven generated four enabling practices and one hindering practice. Item 6 of the EDS form asked principals to evaluate how often the district's administrative hierarchy facilitated its mission. Principal One responded that the district "Never" facilitated the mission of the district. When asked to explain this perception further, however, Principal One offered some praise for the superintendent. Principal One appreciated that the current district administration shifted

away from educational goals focused on student test scores which made it “more about educating the whole child.” School building leaders and district administrators met several times and discussed how to “creatively reach academic goals through hands-on learning.” Overall, Principal One welcomed the shift brought on by the district administration; however, at times, they described the district’s tone seeming to be “so toxic, that it could have been a lot better.” During the interview with Principal One, this was the only topic for which the school leader praised the district administration's actions.

Principal Two responded the district “Always” facilitated the mission of the district. During the interview, they highlighted the importance of the administrators having similar philosophies. They described the district expecting them to create programs in the school “to be in line with district initiatives,” which some school leaders might perceive the expectation to be restrictive but since “district initiatives were built by [the] administrative team” school leaders did not “have missions or goals...that are outside the philosophy.” Another way the district supported principals and facilitated the district's mission was to “organize all professional development.” Principal Two did not identify any hindering practices. That both participants focused on the positive aspects of the districts work regarding the mission of the organization, may hint at the importance of aligning school and district leader philosophies. Even Principal One, who consistently described the district as hindering school leaders, still appreciated when the district’s mission aligned with their educational beliefs.

Question 8. *Individual administrators can use their authority in various ways. In this district, in what ways is administrative authority used to enable principals to do their job? And in what ways is authority used to undermine principals, if that happens?*

Question 8 of the interview protocol was designed to elicit further information about participant responses to items 11 and 12 on the survey. Item 11 asked respondents to note how frequently the superintendent used authority to undermine principals and item 12 assessed how often district administrators used authority to enable principals. Interviewee responses to Question 8 of the interview protocol identified three enabling and four hindering practices. Principal One responded negatively to both survey items saying that the superintendent “Always” used their authority to undermine principals, and district administrators “Never” used their authority to enable principals. Elaborating on the EDS survey responses, Principal One remarked this “particular administration uses their power to try to force things to happen.” In one example, the assistant superintendent of curriculum overrode the principals' judgment insisting they implement an instructional program only the district administrator found to be successful. Principal One described the assistant superintendent as portraying this program as “the end-all-be-all for everyone,” and if “[a principal was] not doing it, then [they were] not doing what's right for kids.” Forcing the use of an instructional program over the principal's judgment exemplified how district authority undermined principals in the district.

Principal One depicted additional hindering behaviors that portrayed district administrators as using their authority to block a principal's efforts or force compliance. Principal One recalled the assistant superintendent of business blocked purchase requests for various items. In one instance, Principal One requested a flat-screen television for

displaying announcements and news stories. The assistant superintendent of business blocked the request, but later that same district administrator purchased and installed a flat-screen TV in their office. Having their request blocked made Principal One feel as though the district administrator abused their power and did not trust the “judgment [of] the building principal.”

As another example, Principal One referenced an incident in which they were blocked from ordering specialty soaps for the staff. The specialty soaps had been a yearly purchase that was done as a small act of appreciation to uplift the teaching staff's morale. When the order was denied, the district told Principal One it was not a frugal purchase. The superintendent's response frustrated Principal One because “there's no rule on it,” and it is within “the building budget.” They explained that the arbitrariness of the decision hindered efforts aimed at raising staff morale.

Principal Two responded positively to both survey items, observing the superintendent “Never” used authority to undermine principals, and district administrators “Always” used their authority to enable principals. The participant further explained how the district used their authority to enable principals by being supportive, encouraging feedback, and offering guidance. Principal Two described the superintendent as using the authority to “support [principals] in [their] decisions.” When a “situation arose that came to [the superintendent's] attention, they would always ask [principals] for [their] input first.” The supportive approach of the district is also evident in other district administrators. Principal Two described an assistant superintendent who used their authority to support school initiatives and provided guidance to building leaders. Sometimes the district administrator would “give [Principal Two] an angle that [they]

hadn't considered before” or cautioned about the timing of a decision. The district's supportive nature enabled the school leader to “constantly have discussions about what's best” and ensured the administrators agreed on how to proceed.

Question 9. *Student achievement is the main goal of districts. In what ways does the administration aid in attaining student achievement and in what ways might it obstruct achievement?*

Principal One responded to item 4 of the Enabling District Structure form by indicating that the district hierarchy “Always” obstructed student achievement. Although the survey response was undoubtedly negative, when asked to explain further during the interview phase, Principal One described hindering and enabling district practices. The school leader relayed how staffing shortages led to underserved students. The school had 15 students requiring academic intervention services, but the school only staffed one teacher for the role. Principal One not only impressed upon the district the school did not “have enough [staff] to cover what we need,” but also explained that “other districts are working with more teachers to cover more kids.” Despite the effort, district administrators denied Principal One’s request to hire additional staff.

While the inability to hire additional academic intervention specialists impeded Principal One’s efforts to raise achievement, the school administrator did praise the district for implementing a new ELA curriculum. Principal One stated, “that something good about the district office was that they changed their ELA curriculum to meet the students’ needs.” The new curriculum was unproven, but Principal One appreciated that the curriculum had intervention work readily available for the students. By providing a

curriculum with intervention activities built into it, the district enabled Principal One's efforts to raise student achievement.

Item four on the survey asked how frequently the district hierarchy obstructed student achievement, Principal Two answered "Never." During the interview, the participant reaffirmed the district did not "obstruct achievement in any way." Principal Two explained that the district's philosophy and "guiding force [for] decision-making" was always to consider "the best thing to do for students." The motivation for administrators was to "make sure [students] were getting the richest possible education" and that there was equity in "the opportunities afforded to students."

An example of this enabling behavior is observed in the district's approach to the transient students under its stewardship. Many of the students in the district do not stay for more than a few years. It is difficult for administrators to know how to best serve these students. However, according to Principal Two administrators "still try to make choices and decisions that...will be advantageous to kids whatever their time here may be." Both Principal One and Principal Two felt they benefitted when the district acted to support classroom instruction. This suggests a fairly simple and straight forward practice for district leaders to implement is to focus more on support principals with instructional concerns as opposed to focusing on accountability.

Question 10. *In what ways has the administration of this district supported and encouraged innovation, and in what ways might it obstruct innovation?*

Research finds a coercive hierarchy obstructs innovation in an organization (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). Principal One and Principal Two identified three enabling practices and one hindering practice. Item nine of the EDS form evaluates how frequently a

principal perceives the district's hierarchy obstructs innovation. Principal One observed that the district “Always” obstructs innovation. In responding to question 10 of the interview protocol, however, Principal One reported a more positive experience. Principal One stated the district administrators “try to support and encourage innovation.” For example, Principal One referenced a character-building program that started at a colleague’s school and was adopted district wide. Principal One supported the use of the program and appreciated seeing the district support its implementation. In addition to the district’s support for the character-building curriculum, Principal One desired to see the district administrators embrace the positive messages espoused by the program and eliminate “some of the toxic and unethical things that they do. While Principal One criticized district administrator behavior, they did describe a more positive overall experience regarding the district’s approach to innovation.

In responding to the EDS survey, Principal Two noted that the district “Never” obstructed innovation. In the interview, Principal Two stated the district “is great in terms of supporting innovation.” The participant attributed this supportive approach to school building leaders having an “equal voice” and a high degree of mutual respect among administrators. For example, when Principal Two proposed an initiative, “98% of the time [the superintendent’s] response [was] ‘yes, let’s find a way to do that. Even if it costs money.’” Based on this context from Principal Two, it seemed that their district looked for ways to innovate in curriculum, discipline, and social-emotional learning. Elevating innovative principal initiatives generated positive responses from both interviewees.

Question 11. *We'd just like to hear what's on your mind, and if you do not have any particular thoughts at first, consider what policies or rules you would like to see, or*

rules you would never like to see. You might share what your feelings are about certain rules, procedures, or structures in this district. Perhaps you know of some other rules that are considered enabling by some principals in the district or enabling by others. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Question 11 served as an open-ended question to allow participants the opportunity to share feelings about rules or policies they encountered or wished to have implemented in their districts. Principal One answered this prompt by focusing on how the district administration created a toxic culture that negatively influenced their work. They began by outlining fundamental expectations for a functioning principal-superintendent relationship. In terms of trust, they felt that most subordinates had “to like someone in order to trust them and follow their lead.” They also explained that they expected any school or district leader to do their “best to bring out the good in people.” According to their responses, their district administration failed to meet these basic expectations. Before this district administration came into power, there was a more collegial relationship between principals and district personnel. Principal One reminisced about holiday parties and other social events attended by district and school-based administrators. However, they described that the current administration cultivated a culture that had become so toxic that these common social events do not occur.

Principal One speculated about what caused the superintendent and other administrators to act in such a toxic manner, postulating that many teachers were motivated to pursue administrative positions out of a desire for more power and authority. They recalled a situation where an administrator “said no to someone just because they had the power to say no to someone.” The participant found behavior such as this to be

“maddening and disheartening” and that “there [was] too many of those kinds of people that can get into positions of authority.” Principal One’s response to this prompt described the district’s toxic culture as being hindering to school improvement efforts. There seemed less of a focus on how specific rules or policies influenced the work and more on how the behaviors and practices of district personnel have led to an unsupportive work environment.

Principal Two reiterated how the collaborative relationship among administrators enabled their work. In one example, they approached the superintendent about initiative fatigue among the staff, stating the district pushed for too much, too quickly. The superintendent responded by limiting new initiatives. It appears the superintendent’s willingness to listen to principal input and not “see it as out of line for [administrators] to give him honest feedback” enabled principals to communicate authentically with the district.

Being open to subordinate feedback was not common among all district administrators. Principal Two reported that the assistant superintendent felt “a little differently about challenging points of view.” They explained that the assistant superintendent accepted differing points of view, “but not quite as readily as [the superintendent].” The district administrator’s reluctance to listen to principal input resulted in Principal 2 being “more hesitant to give [the assistant superintendent] a challenging point of view.” This response seems to indicate that an unwillingness to listen to subordinate feedback hindered communication in the organization.

In addition to hindering and enabling experiences of communicating with supervisors, Principal Two also spoke about the hindering nature of district formalization.

They discussed how the assistant superintendent in charge of business was described as “extremely rule orientated, to the point of being crippling.” Principal felt the disconnect between the administrators originated from the assistant superintendent of business being focused on money, while Principal Two was focused on instruction. The district administrator’s strict adherence to budgeting rules made it seem as though “their rules [were] blind to the humanity of what a school [was].” The assistant superintendent’s strict rule following, combined with ignoring principal input, created obstacles for Principal Two. This seems to indicate to the researcher that the district administrator's behavior formed hindering components within what was otherwise perceived as an enabling district bureaucracy.

Principal Two also found some aspects of the employment contract between the district and the school administrators to be hindering. Principal Two stated the “contract [wasn’t] quite as freeing as it could [have been].” They specifically cited conflicts around compensation and vacation days as being challenging. Principal Two found the position to be stressful and expressed desire to take vacation time to decompress but felt conflicted about doing so. They expressed a culture of overwork stating that because the district was “not the highest paid district around,” the employment contract allowed principals to be “given monetary compensation for [unused] vacation days, creating an incentive this practice. The structure of the contract, in combination with the superintendent’s expectation that “the work gets done,” led the participant to wish for a structure that “allow[ed principals] to take the time need[ed] without feeling like [they were] choosing between money and sanity.”

Another aspect of the contract Principal Two desired to change was the lack of “compensation for advanced education.” By not prioritizing advanced degrees, they discussed that the district was being “a little bit short-sided.”¹

To capture the essence of hindering and enabling bureaucracies, the investigator used interviews so that principals in enabling and hindering school districts could identify specific behaviors and structures in those organizations. Participant interviews revealed numerous district behaviors, rules, and structures that both enabled and hindered their work. Consistent with their EDS survey results, Principal One identified many hindering district practices while Principal Two reported less hindering practices and more enabling district structures. This identification of enabling and hindering behaviors in district bureaucracies is important to school improvement efforts. Suppose district bureaucracies/administrations are to be changed to promote student achievement. In that case, practitioners need to understand which administrative behaviors and structures are considered enabling and hindering by those overseeing the improvement efforts at the school level. Building on the findings previously discussed, the investigator continues a more in-depth analysis of participant interviews to answer Research Question 3. Specifically, the researcher sought to understand how the previously identified enabling and hindering district practices influenced principals' work.

¹ Principal Two is currently pursuing a doctorate in education.

Research Question 3

The investigator conducted a second cycle of coding to group similar district practices under a common theme to better understand how the practices influenced the work of principals. The researcher categorized practices under a larger theme to facilitate the identification of similar behaviors and present a more organized understanding of how these types of behaviors influenced the principal. During interviews, participants identified similar behaviors when responding to different questions. If organized by question, the reader would find it difficult to uncover patterns and connections between their answers. The researcher used the focused coding method (Saldaña, 2015) to group similar behaviors under one theme. By grouping similar behaviors, the investigator hoped to more clearly reveal the influence of those of behaviors on the principal. The analysis of participants' responses as it relates to RQ3 is separated into two parts. First, the researcher presented findings related to hindering district behaviors, rules, and structures. Table 10 contains hindering district practices, the theme under which the researcher classified the behaviors, and a short description of how the behaviors influenced the school leader. A thorough analysis of the influence of hindering district behaviors is then provided. In the second section, the researcher follows a similar structure presenting findings as they relate to enabling behaviors, rules, and practices.

Table 8*Hindering district practices and their influence on the school principal.*

Themes	Practices	Influence on Principal
Unreceptive to input	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Stymied in-person group meetings 2) Unanswered emails 3) Lack of transparency 4) Unwilling to listen 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Reluctant to ask questions during district meetings. 2) Perceived their districts to be unreliable and unsupportive. 3) Unwilling to help implement initiative 4) Hesitant to challenge district administrator's point of view
Untrustworthy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Lied to principals 2) Say one thing do another 3) Conflicting messages to teachers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Creates culture of mistrust that is felt by the school administrators. 2) Barrier to act cohesively, be on the same page, to deliver the same message, to trust each other 3) Conflicting messages, causes confusion among school staff
Reliance on Legal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Legal authorization required suspensions discipline 2) Keeping Legal informed 3) Legal case from Teachers' Union 4) Legal Protection 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Slows the disciplinary process and decreases principal autonomy 2) Excessive paperwork required to keep legal informed can be frustrating 3) Felt punished and weird when legal involvement seemed unnecessary 4) Protects administrators from any kind of harm. Gives confidence and is an advantage for them
Personal time devalued	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Expectation to get work done 2) Contract paid principals for vacation days 3) No tuition reimbursement 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Leads to long work days 2) Incentive to overwork, do not take vacation days 3) Perceived district to be short sighted, tuition costs prohibitive
Unsolicited District Intervention	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Assigned mentor 3rd year 2) Board expectation of involvement 3) Blocked requests 4) Overruled purchases 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Required a lot of principal's time, felt punished 2) Superintendent involvement in school issues undermined principal's authority 3) Resented district decisions 4) Undermined principal's effort to create welcoming culture

Dismissive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Disregard professional experiences of others 2) Staffing requests unfulfilled 3) Ignored legal liability ramifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Frustrated and resented district leaders. 2) Principal could not meet needs of a struggling students. 3) School admins push back when legal ignored. Distrust their guidance
Hostile Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Allowed parents to insult principal 2) Say “no” just because 3) Disrespectful of achievements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Found work environment to be frustrating and principals retired 2) Felt disheartened, and maddened 3) Accomplishments felt tainted, praise seemed unauthentic 4) Generates pity and sad feelings about district 5) Felt punishing, and led to speculation that there were a lot of issues of power behind the scenes

Unreceptive to input. The researcher classified four district behaviors and practices as examples of the district being unreceptive to principal input. The identified behaviors and practices included district administrators’ stemming principal responses during in-person group meetings, leaving principal emails unanswered, offering principals little transparency into their decision making, and an unwillingness to listen to principal input. The four identified behaviors hindered the work of the interviewed principals. Stemming principal responses in group meetings and leaving emails unanswered negatively influenced authentic communication. Having their questions dismissed made building administrators reluctant to ask questions during district meetings. When emails went unanswered, principals perceived district personnel to be unreliable and unsupportive. Principal One alleged a lack of transparency when district administrators met with teachers about a new curriculum without first notifying the

school building leader. Because of the district's lack of transparency, principals felt frustrated and uninformed. In these instances, school leaders hesitated to help implement new district initiatives. Finally, when district administrators seemed unwilling to listen to principal input, school leaders became "more hesitant to give a challenging point of view." An unwillingness to listen to subordinate feedback hindered communication in the organization.

When districts engaged in behaviors and practices that neglected principal input, it negatively influenced the work of the principal. Such practices reduced authentic communication between the school and the district, caused principals to hesitate when implementing district programs, left school leaders describing the district as unreliable and unsupportive, and made principals cautious when challenging a district leaders' points of view. The behaviors hindered principals in their efforts of school improvement.

Untrustworthy. Interviewees identified three behaviors and structures that the researcher categorized as untrustworthy. The principals recalled that being lied to, having administrators say one thing but do another, and conflicting communication with teachers, resulted in distrust within the organization. The behaviors classified as untrustworthy negatively influenced the work of the principals. Participants described district administrators as lying when they made promises to school leaders but did not follow through. This led to feelings of frustration and an overall lack of trust among administrators. Principal One described how this lack of trust among the small district administrative team acted as a barrier to functioning cohesively. The same participant explained how the culture of mistrust, created by these behaviors, influenced teachers, as well. Principal One recalled teachers receiving conflicting messages from district

administrators, causing confusion among school staff. The confusion led to teachers questioning school leader directives. The untrustworthy behaviors identified by the interview participants demonstrated the importance of district follow through and overall organizational trust. When principals perceived these behaviors and structures to be absent from the district bureaucracy, it created frustration, a barrier to functioning as a team, and conflicting messages and confusion among staff.

Reliance on legal guidance. Principals found a district's reliance on legal guidance to be a common structure or rule that influenced their work. The need to adhere to the district's legal structures created hindering and enabling scenarios. Principals found a district's overreliance on legal guidance hindered their work. When districts required school leaders to seek legal authorization for suspensions, principals found the procedure slowed the disciplinary process and decreased autonomy. Districts that required principals to submit documents and keep district lawyers informed about even the most routine suspension incidents caused frustration and excessive paperwork for school leaders. In the case of common, straightforward disciplinary situations, the additional paperwork was perceived as red tape. When the district hired an outside lawyer to investigate a teacher-principal dispute, the principal felt punished by the decision.

Despite the hindering aspects of a district's over reliance on legal guidance, participants acknowledged the need for such advisement. Having district lawyers provide guidance during new or unique situations was an advantage for principals enabled their work. Principal interview responses suggested that a district's reliance on legal guidance can both hinder and enable the work of the school leader. When districts used the legal department to advise principals and protect them from liability, it enabled their work and

gave them confidence in how to proceed. When district lawyers became a check on the school leader instead of a support, Principal Two reported it led to excessive paperwork, slow decision-making, as well as feelings of frustration and reduced autonomy.

Personal time devalued. The researcher selected three policies and rules that centered on the devaluation of a Principal Two's personal time. Principal Two mentioned informal expectations about work completion, compensation for personal days, and a lack of tuition reimbursement as negatively influencing a school administrator's personal life. Districts that held an informal expectation for principals to complete their work ignored the unsustainable nature of the position. Principal One reported working extended days that often overlapped with their personal life. Principal Two cited a district policy that allowed school leaders to be paid for their unused personal days. While the policy could be considered a positive, it had the effect of forcing principals in the district to choose between much need personal time and additional compensation. Principal Two described being forced to choose "between money and sanity." In essence, the district structured the contract to incentivize overwork. The researcher classified a district's lack of tuition reimbursement as a policy that devalued a principal's personal time. Pursuing advanced degrees requires a time and monetary commitment. Principals that commit to such a pursuit are investing time, energy, and salary to become better school leaders. Principal Two communicated that by refusing to reimburse tuition expenses, their district demonstrated to principals that committing time and money to graduate education was unworthy of support. When a district did not compensate for advanced education, Principal Two viewed the organization as being "little bit short-sighted." When districts did not recognize the importance of a principal's personal time, school administrators

described feeling overworked and frustrated, while also viewing the district's priorities as misguided.

Unsolicited district intervention. The investigator grouped three district practices under the theme of unsolicited district interventions. Principals characterized districts that assigned mentors, became involved in school matters, and blocked/overruled routine requests as hindering in nature. While some of the previously mentioned practices are common to school organizations, the unsolicited approach of the district frustrated principals. When a district assigned a participant a mentor in their third year, the principal felt punished and frustrated with the additional time commitment. The board assigned the mentor without first consulting the principal.

School leaders described district administrators as undermining their authority when they inserted themselves into school matters uninvited. Principals expressed concern with how teachers and parents viewed the district's intervention as a check on the school leader. When district administrators blocked a school leader's routine purchase request, despite that there were ample funds in the budget, it caused resentment and confusion. In another instance, a principal bought a new desk and office furniture to welcome a new teacher. The district administrator had the new desk placed in storage and replaced with an older used desk. The district leader overruled this action and restricted the principal in establishing a welcoming culture in the building. The unexpected intervention by the district, coupled with little explanation from the district administrator, led the school leader to describe the district's actions as a harmful misuse of power. Principal One used their professional judgment when ordering items for use in the school. Principal One felt that when district administrators deny or overrule the requests, it sends

a message, “they’re not trusting [the] judgment [of] the building principal.” Unsolicited district interventions interfered with the work of the school building leader. Such interventions led to additional time commitments, undermined the principal’s authority, and created feelings of resentment.

Dismissive. After analyzing principal interview responses, the researcher classified three district practices as being dismissive of school leaders’ concerns. Participants described district administrations as those that disregarded professional experience, left staffing requests unfulfilled, and ignored legal liability concerns. Principal One recalled a situation where the school felt it could not properly serve a student and requested the district consider a more restrictive environment. The district administrator dismissed the request and emphasized that the school needed to try additional support. Principal One noted this was a special education concern and they previously held the Director of Special Education position. As a result of the district’s decision, the student injured staff members, and other students did not receive needed services. The district’s dismissal of the school leaders’ professional experience—and the resulting challenges in the school caused frustration and resentment. The principal described being discouraged that the assistant superintendent’s “professional judgment overrules mine; it overrules everyone else’s. And that’s that.” When district administrators neglected to properly staff mandated academic intervention programs, student learning suffered. As an example, Principal One recalled being denied additional staffing requests for an intervention program despite providing data demonstrating a need. Having the staff request dismissed left student needs unmet, Principal One stated there was “a percentage of kids that need a lot, a lot of support, and we don’t have it.” Another concern dismissed

by district administrators centered on legal liability. A principal recalled district administrators dismissing liability concerns relating to student and staff safety. The school administrator pushed back when an assistant superintendent ignored legal concerns and it caused the principal and staff to question district guidance. Districts that dismissed school leader concerns, bred frustration and resentment, obstructed the principal's school improvement efforts, and caused school leaders to pushback and question district motives.

Hostile environment. The investigator categorized several district behaviors and practices as creating a hostile environment. In such instances, principals perceived the district administrators as intentionally engaging in punitive behavior such as subjecting principals to irate parents, abusing power, and resorting to personal attacks. One respondent described a colleague being subjected to verbal attacks by angry parents in a meeting facilitated by a district administrator. The principal voiced concern about meeting with the parents, but the district administrator insisted the meeting occur. According to Principal One, the district leader allowed the “the mother and father [to swear] at her [and] degrade her.” The principal subjected to the verbal attacks, felt unsupported, and eventually retired. In another example of a hostile environment, Principal One recalled working alongside a district administrator who would “say ‘no’ just because.” The school leader viewed these actions as an abuse of power and felt maddened and disheartened by the administrator denying a request simply because they could.

Finally, when district leaders engage in petty, retaliatory behavior toward school leaders, it reflects negatively on district personnel. When Principal One earned a

doctorate, the district leader celebrated the accomplishment in a notice to staff. However, in private, the district administrator consistently neglected to call Principal One doctor. Because of a contentious working relationship, the principal perceived this omission as intentional and any public praise seemed inauthentic. For Principal One, the petty, vindictive nature of the administrator's behavior created a hostile environment and showed "a lot of issues of power behind the scenes and it's sad."

An analysis of hindering, district behaviors revealed a deleterious effect on a principal's efforts to improve schools, as well as their perceptions of district administrators. When district organizations acted unreceptive to principal input, school leaders perceived districts to be unreliable and unsupportive. Principals reluctantly engaged with district leaders and felt less willing to implement the district initiatives. Districts that dismissed school administrator concerns, specifically regarding student achievement and safety, generated feelings of frustration and resentment leading to a distrust of district guidance. Principals who encountered untrustworthy district behaviors found it difficult to act as a cohesive administrative team leading to conflicting messages and a general culture of mistrust. An over reliance on legal guidance led to additional paperwork and a slowdown of the disciplinary process. In such instances, principals felt frustration and a loss of autonomy. When district expectations and contracts incentivized work, a building principal's personal time became devalued. School leaders recalled working long days and giving up vacation time. Districts that intervened in school matters uninvited undermined the school leader's authority and led to resentment and feelings of being punished. Finally, when district leaders created a hostile work environment, principals felt frustrated and disheartened by the situation. School leaders

described inauthentic interactions with district administrators, and reported colleagues retiring as a result of the toxic environment. The hindering district practices identified by principals negatively influenced their perceptions of the district administrators and impeded their school improvement efforts.

Below, Table 11 contains enabling district practices, the theme under which the researcher classified the practices, and a short description of how the practices influenced the school leader. The investigator then provides a thorough analysis of the influence that enabling district behaviors had on the work of the school principal.

Table 9

Enabling district behaviors and their influence on the school principal.

Themes	Behaviors	Influence on Principal
Seek Principal Input	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Keep them informed 2) Consult principals, Talk it out 3) Team approach 4) Open to subordinate feedback 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) More forthright in communication 2) Seek district administrators input on other topics 3) Supported district initiatives 4) Felt sense of mutual respect 5) On the same page with district.
Organizational Alignment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Expectation of courtesy and respect 2) Hire similar educational philosophies 3) Similar work ethic 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Positive work environment 2) Easy to align school initiatives to district goals 3) Goal alignment frees principal to support students 4) Felt liberated by lack of formal rules
Professional Trust	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Freedom of discretion 2) Informal rules 3) Flexibility 4) Respect professional experience of others 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Made school improvement decisions independent of district 2) Feel organization respects their professional judgment 3) Empowered to make decisions that benefit their school
Support Implementation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Assigned Mentor 2) Rules support disciplinary issues (when need) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Assisted in a lot of ways and provided useful feedback 2) Rules protect and support daily on irate parents and student discipline

	3) Authority supports 'grunt work	3) Allowed principals to see through initiatives supporting mission
	4) Visionary guidance	4) Productive discussions, seek new angles and advice.
Strong leadership with principal input	1) Decisive leadership 2) Organizes professional development	1) Support district decisions and appreciate clarity it brings 2) Confidence in staff development strategy, free to focus elsewhere
Elevates Innovative practices	1) Encourages Principal Creativity 2) Expands project districtwide	1) Sense of strength - mutual respect 2) Support and encourage 3) Equal voice
Focus on all students	1) Revised curriculum student intervention 2) Student-directed support & philosophy	1) Allows principal to intervene academically with more students 2) Focuses decisions around putting students first 3) Support transient students

Seek Principal Input. The researcher classified four district behaviors as representative of the overall theme of seeking principal input. When district administrators required principals keep them informed of potential issues, it facilitated open communication. Principals often encounter situations that require their professional discretion. When such decisions are made, the expectation to keep the district informed ensures that school and district leaders are knowledgeable of developing circumstances and able to respond appropriately. As a result, school leaders communicated more readily and described being more forthright with district leaders. School administrators also recalled how this expectation led to further communication in that they felt open to have a discussion with district administrators. When district administrators communicated with school leaders around important decisions, principals described the practice as a team approach. District leaders consulted principals on significant topics, and school leaders

had opportunities to voice disagreement and seek additional information. Because the district included school administrators in discussions and sought to address concerns and misunderstandings, principals supported initiatives and perceived the district as respecting their input. Districts that sought principal feedback enabled school leaders in their work. School administrators felt they benefited by having discussions with the district about what's best for the school. This level of open communication had principals feeling informed and in coordination with the superintendent. By engaging in behaviors and practices that supported open communication, superintendents created an environment where principals kept leaders informed, sought district input, and supported district initiatives. Principals also described feeling part of a team and on the same page with district leadership.

Culture alignment. The investigator grouped several principal-identified district practices under the theme cultural alignment. Practices such as expectations of courtesy, hiring administrators with similar educational philosophies, and similar work ethic all enabled the job of the principal, by aligning professional cultures. When a district expected courtesy and respect from its school leaders, principals depicted it as being in line with their personal beliefs and creating a collegial, positive work environment. Principals described positive outcomes when school districts hired administrators with similar educational philosophies. For example, Principal Two explained how the superintendent hired people “he felt would align with what he believed,” and it has led to principals being “on the same page as him.” Similar educational philosophies facilitated the alignment of goals which led to initiatives in the school naturally supporting district initiatives. Principal One recalled the positive aspects of having a new superintendent

who redesigned the education goals to make them more about educating the whole child. As a result, the district and principal beliefs aligned, the educational goals aligned, and the school leader felt confident enacting more student-centered curriculum and programs. When school and district leaders had similar philosophies about work expectations there was no need to explicitly state expectations. Regarding expectations, Principal Two stated the superintendent did not expect anything “that I don't expect already of myself.” Similar work and educational philosophies enabled principals to naturally support the district through their school initiatives.

Professional trust. Principal interviews uncovered district practices later categorized under the theme of professional trust. Principals perceived districts practices, such as allowing principals freedom of discretion, using informal rules, demonstrating flexibility with formal expectations, and respecting professional experience, as supportive of the school leaders work. When district leaders trusted school leaders to be professional in the execution of the job, the organization did not require formal rules outlining principal work expectations. The lack of formal rules enabled the principal to have freedom of discretion in decision making and improving the school. Similarly, school leaders described the presence of informal rules and expectations as beneficial to the work. Principal One found it “liberating” that the district did not formalize rules, by putting “things in writing.” When principals encountered formalized structures within the district, they appreciated when administrators demonstrated flexibility. In one district, administrators had productive discussions with school leaders and provided explanations and guidance when asked. When the district is willing to reconsider its formalized rules at the urging of a school leader, principals felt the organization respected their

professional judgment. Additionally, districts demonstrated trust and enabled school leaders, by respecting a principal's professional experience. In one such example, the district tasked a principal with leading central office-level work. Principal Two described how being the "lead administrator for the rewriting of the district code of conduct" empowered them to make changes. This demonstrated to the school administrator that their professional expertise is recognized, and their input is valued. By incorporating principals in district-level work the organization built professional trust and allowed school leaders to shape the district in a way that enabled their work.

Guide implementation. The researcher characterized four enabling district behaviors as guiding school administrators during the implementation of programs and initiatives. During interviews, principals cited district structures such as mentors, rules to support disciplinary issues, program implementation assistance and visionary guidance as being beneficial to their role as school leaders. When the district assigned Principal Two a mentor in their 3rd year, they felt confused and punished. Ultimately, however, as they reflected on the experience, Principal Two felt the mentor assisted in many ways and appreciated the mentor's feedback. The school leader utilized the mentor for guidance and feedback in the execution of their job. Principals identified district rules that supported student discipline as helpful to their role. Principal Two relied on the district rules to "protect and support... on a day-to-day basis." Specifically, district rules related to student discipline allowed the school leader "to have the support [when] dealing with an irate parent or a challenging teacher or a student disciplinary situation." District rules around disciplinary measures supported principals if a stakeholder challenged their decisions. When districts assisted principals with the implementation of initiatives,

specifically those that align with the district mission, school leaders benefited. Principal Two described feeling enabled as a school leader when the district “helped to support the principals in seeing through the grunt work...of fulfilling [district] missions.” When districts assisted principals with the implementation of programs, it allowed school leaders to see through the full realization of the initiative. Finally, districts who provided visionary guidance to principals empowered school leaders in fulfilling their responsibilities. One school leader described seeking guidance from district administrators about “a new angle that hadn't [been] considered,” or advice on whether to “hold off, [and] not make any decision right now because there are other factors or other constituents to consider.” When districts provided visionary guidance to principals on implementing initiatives, school leaders responded, by seeking productive discussions, new perspectives, and advice. Principals benefited when districts created structures to guide program implementation at the school level. Principals identified structures such as mentors, rules to support disciplinary issues, program implementation support, and visionary guidance as enabling their work.

Strong leadership with Principal input. Interview participants identified two enabling behaviors in which the district consulted with principals and then used their authority and power to make final decisions regarding school-level issues. Principal Two found that when, after consulting school administrators, the district showed decisive leadership and organized professional development, school leaders benefited. Principal Two explained that when “the superintendent [made] the final decision.... it's almost always in consultation with the other administrators in the district.” When district used its power and authority in this manner, school leaders supported district decisions and

appreciated the clarity the approach brought to their roles. Similarly, when the district took control of the professional development program, principals benefited. By aligning the professional development to the district mission, principals felt confident that staff would receive relevant training. Districts that led professional development programs removed the responsibility from the principal, allowing the focus to be on other initiatives. District behaviors that demonstrated strong leadership yet still allowed for principal input, enabled school leaders, by bringing clarity to the role and alleviating some of their responsibilities.

Elevates innovation. The investigator grouped two district behaviors under the same theme because they both exemplified how districts elevate principal innovation. Districts that encouraged principal creativity and expanded projects districtwide supported the work of the school leader. Districts encouraged principal creativity when they communicated the importance of, and supported, innovation. In Principal Two's district, the superintendent's "goal is to...find ways to be innovative" around curriculum, discipline and social-emotional learning. There had been clear messaging the district "want[s] to be ahead of the game," in these areas. The superintendent actively supported principal initiatives. Principal Two stated when they approached the superintendent with an idea, "98% of the time he responded yes, let us find a way to do that. Even if it costs money." When districts invited principals to bring new ideas it "ma[de] for a sense of strength" because they "ha[d] a voice in what goes on," and "build[t] on the support [administrators] ha[d] for one another." Where Principal Two focused on the initial support for innovative ideas, Principal One centered on how districts enabled school leaders, by expanding successful school-level projects districtwide. The district's ability

to scale-up innovative school-based practices to district-wide implementation enabled Principal One's school improvement efforts. She recalled being "really happy" to see the district "support and encourage [innovation] outwardly, like that." Districts that encouraged principal creativity and promoted successful school programs districtwide enabled school leaders in their school improvement efforts.

Focus on students. During the interview phase, principals highlighted two district practices centered on improving student achievement. Specifically, principals mentioned providing curriculum with student interventions, and taking a student-centered approach. When the district provided a curriculum with academic interventions built in, it messaged to staff that the organization prioritized supporting struggling students. Principal One stated that when the district implemented such a program, it enabled the work, by helping "more kids have a better curriculum," and made student interventions readily available for the faculty. Principal Two found the district's belief in putting students at the center of decisions enabled their efforts. When the district philosophy is to do "what is best for the students," it becomes the "guiding force" for principal decision making. Principal Two sought to provide the "richest possible education," and ensured "there is fairness in...expectations and in the opportunities afforded to students." As result, Principal Two made "choices and decisions that [would] be advantageous to [transient students]." By focusing on students, district administrators enabled principals to enact student-centered approaches at the school level.

An analysis of enabling, district behaviors, rules, and structures revealed the beneficial influences such practices had on the school leaders' efforts to improve the educational experience, as well as the principals' perceptions of district administrators.

When districts sought principal input, school leaders portrayed an organizational culture that enabled authentic communication between leaders and led to a cohesive administrative team. When the district's culture and expectations aligned with those of the school leader, principals observed it became easier to unify district and school initiatives. District leaders who trusted school administrators to be professional in the execution of the job enabled principals, by allowing them freedom of discretion in decision making and school improving initiatives. When districts provided guidance to principals on the implementation of organizational initiatives, school leaders responded, by seeking productive discussions, new perspectives, and advice. Principals benefited when districts created structures to guide program implementation, by more effectively executing program initiatives. Principals responded positively when districts demonstrated strong leadership, yet still allowed for principal input. These practices enabled school leaders, by bringing clarity to the role and alleviating some of their responsibilities. When districts supported innovation and focused on the needs of the students, principals reported their organization to be enabling their work. By elevating innovative programs and placing the students first, district enabled principals to implement creative pupil-focused reforms. The enabling practices identified by school principals positively influenced their work, by expanding communication and supporting principal efforts at school improvement.

Summary

The results reported in Chapter 4 revealed the substantial effect school district bureaucracies have on building principals. The EDS survey results demonstrated the varying degree to which different aspects of the district bureaucracy enabled principals.

Interview data from two school leaders, identified hindering and enabling district rules, behaviors, and structures. Interviews further revealed the influence of those behaviors, rules, and structures on the efforts of building principals. The data and analysis presented in Chapter 4 provided the basis for the discussion in Chapter 5 regarding the implications of the research findings.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 discusses the research findings presented in the previous chapter. The discussion includes the implications of each major finding, how they relate to the prior research, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. In the discussion of the findings, the researcher triangulates the data found in the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study and compares the results. The chapter asserts that the researcher answered the research questions, and the results could inform future practice.

Implications of the Findings

In redesigning bureaucracies, the goal is to create structures that generate positive outcomes and avoid negative ones. According to Max Weber (1947), the bureaucratic structure of an organization is necessary in attaining the highest possible degree of efficiency. Previous studies have identified two opposing sets of findings: negative and positive (Adler & Borys, 1996; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). The negative findings revealed bureaucratic structures that increased dissatisfaction, deterred creativity, and alienated and discouraged employees. The positive findings revealed organizational structures that clarified duties, decreased stress, guided conduct, and empowered individuals to be more effective (Adler & Borys, 1996; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Sinden, 2002). The present study's overall findings support the theories of Weber (1947) and Adler and Borys (1996), as well as the outcomes revealed by Hoy and Sweetland (2001) and Sinden (2002). The researcher utilized the principals' responses to the Enabling District Structure (EDS) survey to measure the degree to which a school district organization enabled and/or hindered school leaders in their work. A district that registered a low score on the EDS survey indicated that the principal frequently encountered hindering practices that

generated negative feelings toward the organization. The principals recalled that hindering district practices led to resistance among administrators, reduced their cooperation, and undermined the efforts of the principals in school improvement. Conversely, districts that registered a high score on the EDS survey led to positive perceptions of the organization. Principals who encountered enabling practices described that the district's approach facilitated communication, supported program implementation, and empowered principals in their roles. The overall findings suggested a significant alignment between the researcher's findings and the theoretical framework.

The EDS survey determined the school districts' enabling or hindering nature by evaluating the formalization and centralization of their bureaucracies. The findings indicated the benefits of distinguishing between enabling and hindering formalization and centralization in an organization. Adler and Borys (1996) hypothesized that employees differentiated between good and bad practices based on their experience. The findings showed that the principals' responses to the EDS survey supported the claims of Adler and Borys (1996). Principals who experienced a supportive district organization responded accordingly to statements in the EDS survey. School leaders responded positively to statements by describing enabling centralization and formalization. The same participants refuted statements that characterized the district as hindering. Conversely, administrators who reported working in a hindering district bureaucracy responded negatively to statements that described enabling features. When they were presented with statements that characterized a hindering district, the participants affirmed the presence of obstructive elements.

Adler and Borys (1996) also theorized that positive and negative aspects of formalization and centralization would be characterized by features that employees would identify as helpful or harmful to their work. In the qualitative phase of the study, Principal One and Principal Two identified both hindering and enabling aspects of the district organization (Table 9), and they explained how these aspects had influenced their efforts (Table 10 and Table 11). Principal Two's description of a flexible, responsive school district that supported their efforts reflected a flexible and dynamic bureaucracy, which Adler and Borys (1996) posited would enable an employee's work. Similarly, Principal One recalled a school district that overruled and punished, which reflected the coercive bureaucracy that Adler and Borys (1996) theorized would mandate compliance, punish violation, and enforce adherence to certain standards. The findings of the present study supported the opposing bureaucratic models posited by Adler and Borys (1996) and their conclusion that the rules, policies, and structures adopted by an organization profoundly affected those working within its constraints.

Hoy and Sweetland (2001) extended the work of Adler and Borys (1996) and applied their theory to school bureaucracy. Schools are organizations characterized by structure, hierarchy, and formalization. School bureaucracies can positively and negatively influence the work of faculty, staff, and students. Hoy and Sweetland (2001) examined school bureaucracies in an attempt to reconcile the two opposing aspects of bureaucracy as either coercive or enabling. The findings of the present study on district organizations support and extend the conclusions of Hoy and Sweetland (2001) regarding the positive and negative effects of school bureaucracies.

Finding 1: Open Communication Enables

One of the most prominent findings of the study was the importance of communication in the principal–district relationship. Four of the 14 themes that emerged in answering RQ3 concerned the influence of district–principal communication on the work of the school leader. Two themes concerned how principals benefited from the presence of open authentic communication, and two revealed that the absence of communication hindered school leaders. When districts actively sought principals’ input and incorporated it into the decision-making process, school administrators benefited. School leaders recalled feeling respected, and they found it easier to “be on the same page” as district personnel. Principals not only became more forthright about events at their school but also actively sought district guidance on various topics. By incorporating principal feedback into the decision-making process, the district generated support among school administrators for district programs and positions. When superintendents engaged in behaviors and practices that supported open communication, an environment was created in which principals kept leaders informed, sought district input, and supported district initiatives.

While the presence of open, authentic communication enabled district structures, its absence impeded the efforts of school leaders. District personnel who seemed unreceptive to the principal’s participation and who intervened at the school level without school leader input negatively influenced the district–principal relationship. A district’s unwillingness to listen to feedback from subordinates reduced authentic communication with the school leader and led to perceptions of the district as unreliable and unsupportive. When school leaders found the district to be unreliable, they hesitated to

implement a district initiative at the school. The lack of communication also led to hesitancy among principals to challenge a district leader's point of view even though they disagreed with it or found it problematic. Similarly, unsolicited district interventions were found to interfere with the work of the school building leader. When district leaders participated in school-level situations without the principals' input, it undermined the school administrators' authority and created feelings of resentment. In district bureaucracies that did not present behaviors, rules, and structures that supported open communication, principals reported being hesitant to support initiatives and unwilling to challenge district positions. The principals also perceived that the district was unsupportive and undermined their authority. Such practices hindered the principals in their efforts to improve their schools.

The findings of the present study extended Hoy and Sweetland's (2001) emphasis on authentic communication as an enabling bureaucratic structure. Hoy and Sweetland (2001) also found that authentic communication enabled the teacher–principal relationship. The present study extended those findings to the principal–district relationship, showing that authentic communication was characteristic of an enabling district bureaucracy and led to higher levels of cooperation and support. Principals in enabling school districts indicated that they regularly encountered administrative rules that enabled authentic communication ($M = 4.14$). The findings of the present study also extended Sinden's (2002) conclusions that two-way communication at the school level between teachers and principals enabled teachers in their work and that open and honest communication was important in enabling administration. The study's next major finding

built on Hoy and Sweetland's (2001) demonstrated claim that authentic communication was associated with a greater degree of trust.

Finding 2: Trust Builds Support.

Principals who reported frequent, open communication with district personnel also described a high level of trust among administrators. These principals perceived district practices, such as allowing principals freedom of discretion, using informal rules, demonstrating flexibility in formal expectations, and respecting professional experience, as enabling their work. When the principals encountered formalized structures within the district, they appreciated the flexibility demonstrated by administrators. Districts that were willing to reconsider formalized rules at the urging of a school leader made principals feel that the organization respected their professional judgment. Additionally, districts demonstrated trust and enabled school leaders by respecting a principal's professional experience. When district leaders trusted school leaders to be professional in the execution of their jobs, the organization did not require formal rules regarding expectations of the principals' work. The lack of formal rules enabled principals to have the freedom of discretion in decision-making and improving the school. These findings align with Sinden's (2002) and Hoy and Sweetland's (2001) conclusions regarding enabling structures at the school level. Sinden's (2002) research revealed that teachers appreciated the principal's flexibility in decision-making and in interpreting and applying rules, whereas the present study concluded that principals felt enabled when districts reconsidered formalized rules at the urging of school leaders. This finding supports Hoy and Sweetland's (2001) claim that enabling rules and procedures should be flexible guidelines rather than rigid structures.

Conversely, principals who recalled having been lied to, having administrators who said one thing but did another, and having to navigate conflicting messages to teachers perceived the district to be untrustworthy. Behaviors classified as untrustworthy negatively influenced the work of the principal. When the principals viewed the district as having lied, it led to feelings of frustration and an overall lack of trust among the administrators. Districts that did not follow through on promises and sent conflicting messages to teachers created confusion among school leaders and staff. The resulting lack of trust led to teachers questioning school leader directives. Untrustworthy behaviors identified by the interview participants demonstrated the importance of district follow-through and overall organizational trust. When the principals perceived these behaviors and structures to be absent from the district bureaucracy, it created frustration, prevented team functioning, and led to conflicting messages and confusion among staff.

The absence of a trusting working relationship between school and district administrators created frustration and conflict in the organization. Although it was not explicitly linked to untrustworthy behavior, principals who did not trust their district often referred to issues of power within the leadership. The presence of conflict and power struggles reaffirmed two findings by Sinden (2002). First, at the school level, Sinden concluded that the more honest a leader was perceived to be by the staff, the less conflict the staff felt. Second, the findings showed that the lack of trust and authenticity was often due to a struggle for power in the organization. Enabling district administrations that valued honesty worked to establish a culture of trust among administrators. Districts that trusted their school leaders also respected their expertise and allowed them the freedom to implement innovative practices at the school level.

Finding 3: Support Innovation and Implementation

Principals that frequently encountered district practices that supported school leader innovation and the overall implementation of initiatives described the bureaucracy as enabling their work. When districts provided guidance, clarified disciplinary decisions, and provided resources for implementation, the principals described the organization as supporting implementation. District guidance included direct support, such as principal–superintendent conversations, as well as indirect support through a mentorship program. District guidance provided useful feedback, which resulted in productive discussions that offered the principals a unique perspective and advice. The principals felt protected when district rules supported disciplinary decisions and clarified matters for irate parents. Moreover, organizational support for the implementation of school-level programs allowed the principals to successfully carry out initiatives that would enable the district’s mission.

Districts that were perceived as supportive of innovation also aided principals by encouraging principal creativity and expanding successful districtwide school-level projects. When a district supported school leader innovation, the principals felt strengthened respect for their district leaders. The school administrators described that having an equal voice, as well as being supported and encouraged to innovate, led to creative school-level practices. In enabling some districts, these innovative practices would be expanded districtwide. When a fellow principal led a successful program before it was expanded districtwide, it generated greater participation among school leaders than when district personnel mandated the implementation of a program. Hence, by supporting

implementation and innovation at the school level, districts facilitated the work of the principal.

Sinden's (2002) study on the school level found that when principals treated teachers as subject experts, they felt supported. Enabling administrations respected this expertise and gave teachers the freedom to try innovations that seemed appropriate. The findings of this study extended Sinden's (2002) conclusions to the district level. Being supportive of principal innovation and facilitating the implementation of initiatives enabled the work of principals. Principals who felt encouraged to innovate described feeling respected and empowered. In the absence of a supportive approach to school leaders, these principals felt hindered by the dismissive practices of district leaders.

Hoy and Sweetland (2001) found that hindering formalization was negatively associated with innovation. The term hindering centralization refers to a hierarchy and administration that obstructs rather than helps its participants. Moreover, a hindering hierarchy obstructs innovation. The findings of Hoy and Sweetland at the school level were extended to the district level. The findings of the present study showed that principals who rated their district as hindering in nature also found it to be unsupportive and negatively associated with innovation. When asked about a district's approach to innovation and support, the school leaders in hindering districts described behaviors that were dismissive of their expertise. These principals recalled that the district disregarded the professional experience of school leaders, ignored their staffing worries about vital programs, and overlooked legal liability concerns. Such actions caused frustration and resentment among district superiors. When the principals' staffing concerns were dismissed, they felt rejected, knowing they could not meet the needs of their students.

When districts ignored legal liability concerns, the principals became distrustful of district personnel guidance. District bureaucracies that were dismissive of principals' concerns hindered school leaders' improvement efforts and generated resentment.

Finding 4: Aligning Personal and Professional Values

During the interview phase of the study, the principals referenced the alignment or misalignment of values between their philosophies and beliefs and those of the district. Principals who frequently encountered enabling district practices described having similar educational philosophies and work ethics as their superintendent had. The principals also mentioned the benefits of district administrators who shared similar expectations of professional courtesy and respect. When the beliefs and values of the principal and district were aligned, the principals reported a positive work environment where they felt liberated by the lack of formal rules. School leaders attributed the lack of rules to the alignment of values, explaining that when the educational philosophies of the principal and superintendent were aligned, the district did not need to exert control. These principals found it easy to align school initiatives with district goals. When the district goals and school administrators' beliefs were focused on supporting all students, the principals felt free to adjust the curriculum to support specific student groups. These findings supported the theories developed by Hoy and Sweetland (2001).

Although Hoy and Sweetland (2001) focused more on school practices than on school culture, the present study's findings regarding the sharing of educational beliefs between the principal and the district supported their findings. According to Hoy and Sweetland (2001), a top-down approach to controlling organizations would hinder the work of subordinates. In schools where administrators controlled professional work in a

top-down fashion, Hoy and Sweetland (2001) found that the teachers resisted. Teachers' perceptions that professional rules were excessive were typically caused by negative consequences (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). In this study, the researcher found that at the district level, the principals felt empowered and liberated when the district did not impose extensive formal rules and allowed them the professional freedom to act in the best interests of the students. Because of the dynamic nature of the school administrator's role, rules that limited their autonomy tended to be restrictive.

The principals who reported frequently encountering hindering bureaucratic practices also reported a misalignment between their values and beliefs and those of the district leader. The researcher classified examples of conflicting values under the theme of "Hostile Work Environment." To answer RQ3, the researcher analyzed the principals' responses regarding the influence of hindering and enabling district practices. The influence of the behaviors classified under the theme of Hostile Work Environment created an unfriendly workplace. During the interview, in describing these practices, Principal One repeatedly expressed that she could not understand why a district leader would act in such a way. The disconnection in understanding and agreeing with the actions of the district leaders exemplified the underlying conflict between the values and beliefs of the school leader and those of the district. When a district leader allowed a principal to be verbally attacked by parents, the interviewee felt disheartened and upset that the leader would facilitate such an incident. When the district rejected routine purchase orders or denied other requests without an explanation, or simply "because they could," the interviewee reported feeling punished and saddened that the leaders would act

in this way. These negative feelings reflected the incompatibility between the school leader's values and the district's actions.

When the values and beliefs of the school and district leaders were aligned, it facilitated the work of the school leader by facilitating the adherence of school-level programs and initiatives to the goals of the district. When those values and beliefs were aligned, the principals reported negative feelings toward the district and resentment of the actions of the district leaders.

Finding 5: Time is Valuable.

In addressing RQ3, two themes emerged based on a common finding regarding the devaluation of the principal's time. The theme "Personal Time Devalued" included district practices that were perceived as undermining the importance and value of a school leader's free time. When district practices led to longer workdays and contracts incentivized overwork, the principals felt overwhelmed by their workloads. Districts that refused to reimburse graduate education conveyed the message that a principal's time commitment to furthering their education was not valued. The second theme, "Reliance on Legal Guidance," demonstrated the frustration that the principals felt when district policies led to additional time spent completing seemingly unnecessary paperwork. When districts relied on legal guidance in many situations, the principals often had to complete the associated paperwork. These principals appreciated legal support in unfamiliar or delicate situations, but when their districts insisted on obtaining legal advice in making routine decisions, the school leaders perceived that the required paperwork was excessive and an inefficient use of their time. In both cases, the principals viewed their time as

valuable, and when district practices and policies did not reflect this view, they found that it hindered their efforts.

Although it was not addressed in Hoy and Sweetland's (2000) theoretical framework, the researcher's findings supported the claim that the negative consequences of formalization are not necessarily inherent in the rules themselves. Instead, negative perceptions are due to the decisions of administrators in establishing rules and procedures. Principal Two did not think that the district intentionally incentivized overwork but that principals would appreciate being paid for unused personal days. Similarly, the district's reliance on legal guidance was understood as protection against lawsuits and legal exposure. However, because the district established these policies without the principals' input, the school leaders perceived them negatively despite their good intentions.

Hoy and Sweetland (2000) applied the concepts of enabling and hindering centralization and formalization to school bureaucracy. An enabling school structure builds on the idea that a school's hierarchy and system of rules and regulations help faculty and staff achieve the organization's goals. In this study, the researcher applied Hoy and Sweetland's theoretical framework to the district organization. The findings not only supported Hoy and Sweetland's theories at the school level but also extended them to the district bureaucracy. Enabling district structures supported the work of the principal, and the districts' system of rules and regulations guided problem solving. In districts with enabling structures, principals and district leaders worked cooperatively and resolved issues through shared decision-making. In contrast, hindering district structures tightly controlled and managed the principals.

In hindering district structures, a system of rules and regulations was coercive, and the hierarchy inhibited the work of school leaders. In such bureaucracies, the districts did not treat principals as trusted professionals. In these structures, the power of the district leader was enhanced, but the work of the principal seemed diminished.

Sinden, Hoy, and Sweetland (2004) theorized that formalization and centralization in schools could be hindering and enabling in nature. They claimed that for schools to improve, there must be a structure that enables participants to do their jobs creatively and professionally (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Sinden et al., 2004). Similarly, this study found that the school districts were formalized and centralized and that these elements both hindered and enabled the school administrator's efforts. For principals to succeed in their role, enabling district structures must be present.

Relationship to Prior Research

Challenges in Principal Turnover, Recruitment, and Retention

The findings of the current study indirectly support the recent literature on investigating challenges in principal turnover, retention, and recruitment. The principal attrition rate has become an increasing problem in districts across the country. Bteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2012) demonstrated the negative consequences of principal turnover. Several researchers found that job stress was a common source of tension in school leaders (Clifford, 2010; Fullan, 2018). Such stress could have several causes, including working long hours, unreachable expectations, extensive paperwork, and social problems (Evans, 2010). During the interview phase of the present study, the researcher found that principals in both hindering and enabling districts expressed that the demands of the position were challenging in their work. Principal Two noted a concern about long

hours and the lack of personal time. Principal One expressed frustration with administrators because the district refused to adequately staff the academic intervention program, yet it questioned the lack of student progress. These feelings of frustration regarding improper staffing echoed the “unreachable expectation” (Evans, 2010; Ikemoto, Gates, & Hamilton, (2009) that school leaders lack the necessary resources to accomplish all that is required to lead their school effectively.

Finally, the results of both the interviews with the principals and the EDS survey highlighted the frustration with excessive paperwork. The interviewees referred to both the burden of legal requirements and the associated excessive paperwork. When asked about “district red tape” in the EDS survey, the principals said that district red tape was an issue at least some of the time ($M = 3.55$). The mean score of 3.55 was one of the lowest scores on the EDS survey, indicating that the principals found “red tape” to be a problematic aspect of the bureaucracy. While “red tape” was not explicitly linked to excessive paperwork in the survey, it is generally understood as a component of the phrase, “excessive paperwork.” (Bennett & Johnson, 1979). The study’s findings did not directly link hindering bureaucracies to the challenges surrounding principal turnover, recruitment, and retention. However, the researcher found that the sources of job stress in Evans (2010) were present in the principals’ descriptions of hindering district organizations. Although a further study is required to establish this relationship, the findings of the present study suggested a potential association between hindering and enabling bureaucracies and school leader recruitment and retention.

Principal Autonomy

The district–principal relationship is an influential component of a school administrator’s decision to change or remain in their current position. Previous studies examined the role of principal autonomy and found it to be associated with retention decisions. These findings suggested that school leaders left their position when they lacked independence (Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011), whereas those who felt empowered tended to remain (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). For instance, Tekleselassie and Villarreal (2011) determined that districts could leverage retention by decentralizing key decisions at the school level. Allowing principals to direct their focus and resources in ways that address their school needs may lead to a reduction in turnover (Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011). Although the present researcher did not attempt to link turnover and enabling district structures, the findings supported the claim made by Tekleselassie and Villarreal III (2011). Working in a hindering district, Principal One made several references to the challenges caused by issues of power and authority at the district level. Examples included the district’s rejection of purchase requests, its unwillingness to properly staff intervention programs, and mandates regarding curriculum changes. The findings indicated that the lack of autonomy was related to the bureaucracy of a hindering district. Conversely, Principal Two worked in an enabling district and described feeling empowered by the district leaders. According to Farley-Ripple, Raffel, and Welch (2012), principals who felt they had strong district support regarded it as a positive working condition that contributed to their decision to stay. The principals described strong support as being the central office’s provision of autonomy and trust in their judgment (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). Similarly, in the present study, Principal Two

referred to district practices that allowed for greater autonomy in enabling their role. Specifically, Principal Two identified practices such as emphasizing freedom of discretion, implementing informal rules, demonstrating flexibility in meeting formal expectations, and respecting professional experience, all of which supported the school leader's work. Thus, the findings support the notion that the district's support for principals' autonomy serves to create a desirable workplace for school leaders.

Chang, Leach, and Anderman (2015) studied principal-perceived autonomy and the power to make independent decisions. Their findings showed that the principals were more committed to their school districts and more satisfied with their jobs when they perceived that their superintendents were supportive of autonomy at the school level (Chang et al., 2015). This finding was supported by Principal Two, who rated the school district as enabling in the survey and then described the district as supportive of autonomy at the school level. According to Chang, Leach, and Anderman (2015), principals need the authority and support required by district leaders to select and hire the staff they need, allocate their site resources in a manner that supports the site goals, and make instructional decisions that address the unique needs of their student population. During the interview phase, Principal One's concerns reflected the findings of Chang, Leach, and Anderman (2015). Principal One reported that the district hindered efforts to improve schools when the administrators denied staffing requests, rejected budget allocations for specific purchases, and mandated curriculum use without the principals' input.

When districts are reoriented to guide and support school leaders while allowing them the freedom to make school-level decisions, principals feel empowered to meet the

unique needs of their schools. Principals who feel empowered have higher levels of job satisfaction and a stronger commitment to the organization (Chang et al., 2015). Because of the important role principals play in school improvement efforts, redesigning districts to enable their work is a vital component of school reform.

District Use of Principal Time

Although research has shown the need for school-level autonomy, principals are often required to implement practices and policies that are designed without their input, which may not advance, or even hinder, their own school-level goals (Daly et al., 2011). Schools districts often do not give principals the opportunities (Ikemoto et al., 2014) or the resources (Ikemoto et al., 2009) to implement district policies in ways that make sense for their schools. As a result, the principals reported that their time was spread so thinly across so many roles and tasks that they felt that they could not do any of them well enough.

In a study of district support for school principals, Jerald (2012) found that by limiting central office requests, effective districts enabled principals to focus their time on the most important aspects of their job. When central office requests were limited, principals prioritized district initiatives and critical instructional leadership activities. Jerald's (2012) findings were reaffirmed by the interviewees, who expressed frustration regarding excessive legal paperwork for routine disciplinary measures.

Impact of the Superintendent and District Offices

In studying the effect of the school district on student achievement, Whitehurst, Chingos, and Gallaher (2013) found that school districts accounted for a small variation in student test scores. Furthermore, Chingos, Whitehurst, and Lindquist (2014) found that

the superintendent position was even less influential than the school district in increasing student achievement. Principals and schoolteachers exerted far more influence over raising student achievement compared with the contribution of school districts and superintendents. The reported findings were significant for the current study because they provided empirical evidence that supported efforts to improve student achievement through the district support of school-level reforms. The researchers (Chingos et al., 2014; Whitehurst et al., 2013), however, did not identify common practices that could benefit school-level personnel. The present study extended the findings of Whitehurst, Chingos, and Gallaher (2013) and Chingos, Whitehurst, and Lindquist (2014) by creating a framework of principal-identified hindering and enabling district practices. The researcher hopes that the creation of the frameworks will guide district leaders in creating more supportive environments for principals. In understanding that school-level actors, such as principals and teachers, have a significant influence on student achievement, both researchers and practitioners have focused on how best to support the work of faculty and staff in school buildings.

Changing Role of the School District

According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), school districts have failed to provide principals with the working conditions they need to succeed. The SREB found that this failure was the main reason for problems that plagued the education system (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). In their study, Bottoms and Fry (2009) found that principals at the most-improved high schools felt they had a collaborative working relationship with the district, in which the district staff took responsibility for improving student achievement and for supporting the principals. The school administrators at the

least-improved high schools described that the district office had centralized most reform initiatives. The district leaders did not work to empower principals, nor did they plan to build the capacity of school leaders to be influential in school reform (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). The present study's findings support the conclusions of the SREB and Bottoms and Fry (2009). Principal One described the district's practices that hindered school improvement, referring to the lack of autonomy and the resulting conflicts over staffing and curriculum as examples. Because the present study did not attempt to correlate student achievement with hindering district practices, the researcher cannot posit that hindering districts result in lower achievement. However, the similarities in the experiences of Principal One and the administrators at the least-improved schools supported the conclusions of Bottoms and Fry's (2009) study. Moreover, the experiences of Principal Two, as well as the principals at the most-improved schools in Bottoms and Fry's (2009) study, were remarkably similar. The findings of both studies emphasized the collaborative and supportive nature of the district–principal relationship as central to the success of the school leader in school improvement. The descriptions of the districts by the principals at the most-improved schools mirrored those of enabling organizations, whereas the descriptions of the principal–district relationship at the least-improved schools affirmed the descriptions of hindering districts. Therefore, further research is warranted to determine what connection, if any, exists between hindering and enabling district structures and student achievement.

Bottoms and Schmidt-Davis (2010) demonstrated the ways in which districts supported principals in improving student learning. Their study concluded that highly supportive districts acted proactively in a school- and instruction-oriented manner.

Districts that were identified as less supportive lacked awareness of their inadequacies. Highly supportive districts had developed their structures and systems over time through stakeholder input and guidance from outside organizations (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). The present study built on the findings of Bottoms and Schmidt-Davis (2010) by creating a framework for enabling and hindering district practices. Becoming a highly supportive district and improving student achievement is not achieved quickly or haphazardly (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). The researcher hopes that the creation of enabling and hindering district practice frameworks could be used to design systems and structures that support school principals.

In 2014, the New Leaders organization released a report that outlined a framework for creating conditions that supported the success of school leaders. Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, and Davis (2014) highlighted the importance of creating district-level structures and systems to support the work of school principals. Previous studies found that excellent school systems supported the work of strong school leaders and enabled this effectiveness across their districts. The New Leaders report (2014) concluded that as districts prioritize school leadership, they should also recognize that even the best leaders cannot achieve their potential within district structures and systems that do not support them and/or act as barriers to their success. The overall findings of the present study support the conclusions of the New Leaders organization report (2014). Principals who rated their district positively consistently referred to the supportive nature of the district and how it enabled their work. Conversely, principals in hindering districts recalled district practices that obstructed their goals. The findings of the present study are aligned with Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, and Davis's (2014) finding that districts bear the

primary responsibility for creating structures and conditions that enable the effectiveness of school leaders.

Summary of the Relationship Between Prior Research and the Present Study

School districts have been found to be very influential regarding the role of the principal. When districts are reoriented to guide and support school leaders while allowing them the freedom to make building-level decisions, principals feel empowered to meet the unique needs of their schools (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018; Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011). Empowered principals have higher levels of job satisfaction and greater substantial commitment to the organization (Chang et al., 2015). The findings of the present study have provided insights into how school districts can be made more supportive of school leaders. The present study has contributed to the current literature by identifying district practices that enable and hinder school principals. Moreover, the findings of the present study revealed the influence of district practices on the work of school leaders. These findings have demonstrated the significance of reorienting districts to create more supportive workplaces for principals.

Limitations of the Study

There are several threats to the external validity of the quantitative portion of this study. These include geographic limitations: the study was conducted only in New York State. In New York State, public school districts operate under statewide guidance. The experiences of principals working in districts subject to New York State rules likely differ from those of principals in other states. Hence, the geography and the setting limit the external validity of this research. Another limitation is the type of institution. In this

study, only public schools were included. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to non-public school systems.

Additional threats to the generalizability of the quantitative research are low response rates and response bias. Survey researchers strive to achieve high response rates, so they can be confident in generalizing the results to the population under study (Creswell, 2012). The low rate of response to the EDS survey (8.4%) was a possible limitation of this study. The low response rate also affected the internal validity of the research. Low response rates negatively affected the ability of the researcher to accurately describe the extent of hindering and enabling structures across New York State schools. Although the response rate is important in survey research, response bias is of even greater concern. Biased responses result in an inadequate database (Creswell, 2012). When the responses do not accurately reflect the views of the sample and the population, the generalizability of the study findings is further limited.

The self-selecting nature of the participants was also a limitation. In the present study, the only responses included were those of the principals who wished to volunteer their time in responding to the EDS survey. Because the intrinsic motivation of the respondent may affect the results (Fowler Jr, 2013), it is possible to speculate that only the most and/or the least satisfied principals took the time to respond to this self-administered survey (Landy, 2013). There are additional threats to the reliability of the quantitative study as well.

The reliability of the EDS survey form was established through the repeated administration of the instrument to various groups of teachers (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). The modifications of the EDS survey form, which were made to measure the principals'

perceptions of the school district bureaucracy, created potential threats to the reliability of the data collection instrument. Hoy and Sweetland (2001) conducted reliability measurements in their survey of teachers. In the present study, the researcher designed the EDS survey form to target principals. This change in the study population potentially limited the reliability of the data collection instrument. Although identical EDS survey forms have been used in previous studies, researchers did not conduct reliability measurements (Kotnis, 2004; Landy, 2013). Another threat to the validity of the quantitative portion of the study is the social desirability response bias. The principals may have selected answers that reflected socially acceptable responses. Although this type of bias is often associated with surveys on sensitive topics, recent studies have also found social desirability response bias in surveys on mundane topics (Miller, 2012).

In addition, there are several threats to the trustworthiness of the qualitative phase of the study. The study is limited by the extent of the bureaucracy that is investigated. School district bureaucracy was the focus of the principals' responses. However, the behavior, rules, and practices implemented by New York State superintendents and district personnel are affected by school boards, as well as city, state, and federal education bureaucracies. Thus, a potential limitation of the study is that the hindering or enabling aspects of the district may be direct results of school board decisions and policy directives at the federal, state, or city levels. In this case, there may be less variability across districts and therefore less differentiation between their hindering and enabling aspects, as described by the principals. Another limitation of the study is the lack of triangulation. Typically, triangulation is used to enhance the validity of the research as well as the breadth and depth of the data. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic and St.

John's University's Institutional Review Board restrictions, the researcher could not conduct observations. Additionally, despite repeated requests from the researcher, the interview respondents neglected to provide artifacts and documents for analysis. Because of the lack of triangulation, the analysis of the qualitative data relied solely on the self-reported behaviors and experiences of the interview participants. This could be problematic, as self-reported behaviors and reports on the behavior of others may be significantly biased (Muijs, Harris, Lumby, Morrison, & Sood, 2006).

Recommendations for Future Practice

Empower Principals Based on These Findings

The findings of this study showed that principals, as advocates of their profession, could benefit from the recognition that they influence, and are influenced by, the district bureaucracies for which they work. A broader awareness of the presence of hindering and enabling practices, as well as their effects on the role of the school leader, could serve to promote more thoughtful and strategic conversations with district administrators. This awareness may also prompt principals to reflect not only on the support that they require the most but also on the ways in which seemingly benign or well-intended district structures may inadvertently contribute to the stressful situations with which they must deal. Raising the awareness of hindering and enabling behaviors, rules, structures, and their positive and negative influences on the role of the school leader may cause principals to consider their influence on educators at the school level.

Empower District-Level Leaders Based on These Findings

District-level leaders also need to be aware of the intended and unintended consequences of their actions. An appreciation of the characteristics of the enabling

school structures articulated by Hoy and Sweetland (2001), as well as the findings of the present study, should help guide district-level administrative practice. Specifically, in enabling structures, leaders guide problem solving, facilitate open authentic communication, and support subordinates' efforts. The same leaders create encouraging workplaces where employees can do their jobs without undue concerns about conflict and punishment. This recognition, combined with an appreciation of how enabling and hindering district structures influence school leaders, could contribute to increasing the effectiveness of district-level leadership.

Encourage Building and District-Level Administrators to Consider the Underlying Causes of Inefficiency and/or Stress

To truly effect district change, district personnel need to identify behavioral and structural explanations of unsatisfactory outcomes. Adler and Borys (1996) hypothesized that employees differentiated between good and bad practices based on their experience. They theorized that good and bad aspects of formalization and centralization would be characterized by certain features that employees would identify as helpful or harmful to their work. By considering the experiences of principals and the identified practices, school and district administrators may begin to consider the underlying causes of hindering practices.

Work Toward Facilitating Principalship

District-level administrators need to demonstrate both compassion and creativity in their efforts to support principals. This is particularly true regarding the managerial duties of the principal. Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, and Davis (2014) concluded that districts bear the primary responsibility for creating structures and conditions that enable

school leaders to be effective. A common theme that emerged in the related literature, EDS survey results, and interview data was the unsustainable nature of the position. The disproportionate amount of time spent on paperwork and administrative tasks detracted from the time that principals should spend on instructional leadership.

Prototypes

A prototype is an early sample, model, or release of a product, which is built to evaluate a concept or process. The purpose of creating a prototype of enabling and hindering district administrations is to provide an initial framework for district personnel to consider in evaluating their organization. The following prototypes are based on the interviews with principals and the responses of school leaders to the EDS survey.

Enabling Prototype

Formalize Open Communication. Principals in enabling districts frequently encountered rules and structures that encouraged authentic communication with the district. District administrators with the formal expectation that principals keep them informed of potential issues facilitated open communication. Entrusting principals to exercise their professional discretion to make decisions yet maintain the expectation that district leaders are kept informed ensures that school and district leaders are knowledgeable about developing circumstances and responding appropriately.

School administrators benefit when district leaders consult principals on significant topics and school leaders have opportunities to voice disagreement and seek additional information. Incorporating principals' input is respectful of their professional expertise and increases their participation in district initiatives, thus improving the coordination between the school and district organizations.

Hire Principals with Similar Philosophies. Principals who frequently encountered enabling district practices described having educational philosophies and work ethics that were similar to those of their superintendent. Aligning the professional values of the district and school leader benefits the organization. Hiring administrators with similar educational philosophies and similar work ethics enables the work of the principal. Similar educational philosophies facilitate the alignment of goals, which leads to initiatives in the school to support district initiatives. When the stakeholders have similar work ethics, there is a reduced need to state expectations, which enhances flexibility in completing tasks.

Trust the Professional Expertise of the Principal. Principals who reported frequent, open communication with district personnel also described high levels of trust among administrators.

Professional trust gives school leaders the confidence and flexibility to address their school's unique needs. Districts encourage professional trust by allowing principals freedom of discretion and reliance on informal rules. When district leaders trust school leaders to be professional in the execution of the job, the organization does not require formal rules for principal work expectations. The lack of formal rules enables the principal to have freedom of discretion in decision-making and improving the school.

Professional trust is also enhanced when districts demonstrate flexibility in formal expectations and incorporate the principal's professional experience. When a district is willing to reconsider its formalized rules at the urging of a school leader and incorporate principal experience into district-level work, the organization builds professional trust and allows school leaders to shape the district in a way that enables their work.

Function as a Guide to Implementation. Enabling districts created structures that functioned as guides for school administrators during the implementation of programs and initiatives.

District structures, such as mentors, rules regarding disciplinary issues, program implementation assistance, and visionary guidance, benefit school leaders in their role. School leaders utilize mentors for guidance and feedback in the execution of their jobs. District rules regarding disciplinary measures support principals if a stakeholder challenges their decision. When districts assist principals in the implementation of programs, it allows school leaders to fully realize the initiative. When districts provide visionary guidance on implementing initiatives, school leaders respond by seeking productive discussions, new perspectives, and advice.

Seek Principal Input and Act Decisively. Principals in enabling districts reported that the hierarchy frequently used their authority to enable school leaders.

Strong district leadership, in consultation with school administrators, demonstrates power and decisiveness. When superintendents use their power and authority in this manner, school leaders support district decisions and appreciate the clarity that the approach brought to their roles.

Elevate Innovative School Practices. Principals that frequently encountered district practices supportive of school leader innovation and the overall implementation of initiatives described the bureaucracy as enabling their work.

Districts should encourage principal creativity and expand successful projects districtwide. Districts stimulate principal creativity by communicating the importance of

innovation and inviting principals to voice new ideas. Districts that expand on successful school-level projects encourage the creation of innovative school-based practices.

Keep the Focus on Students. Principals in enabling districts found that the organization's focus on student achievement empowered their efforts.

Districts should communicate the importance of keeping students at the center of the decision-making process, and they should focus their efforts on supporting principals in improving student achievement. Districts that provide curricula with interventions to support all students communicate that the organization prioritizes supporting struggling students. When districts communicate the importance of putting students at the center of decisions, principals enact student-centered approaches at the school building level.

Hindering Prototype

Unreceptive to input. Principals in hindering districts reported challenges in communicating effectively with district personnel.

Districts should not limit communication or dismiss school leader input. In this study, the principals described district administrators as unwilling to listen when they left principals' emails unanswered, stymied school leader responses during group meetings, and offered little transparency in their decision-making. Such actions negatively influenced authentic communication. Principals recalled being reluctant to ask questions and perceived the district personnel as unreliable and unsupportive. In encountering a district's lack of transparency, the principals felt frustrated and "kept out of the process." As a result, the school leaders hesitated to implement new district initiatives.

Untrustworthy. Principals in hindering districts did not trust district leaders.

Districts should not engage in deceptive practices or sidestep the principal when they communicate with teachers. In this study, the principals described the lack of trust as a barrier to functioning cohesively. When the principals perceived that honesty was absent from the district bureaucracy, it led to frustration, hindered functioning as a team, and created conflicting messages and confusion among staff. The untrustworthy behaviors identified by the interview participants demonstrated the importance of district follow-through and overall organizational trust.

Reliance on Legal Guidance. Hindering districts created an overreliance on legal guidance, which slowed performance and created excessive paperwork.

Districts should not require school leaders to seek legal authorization for routine suspensions or submit excessive paperwork. The principals expressed that the overreliance on legal guidance and paperwork slowed the disciplinary process, decreased autonomy, and led to excessive paperwork by school leaders. However, the school administrators recognized the need for legal guidance to advise principals and provide legal protection. The findings of this study demonstrated that the way in which districts structure the principal–legal department relationship was a key determinant in whether school leaders viewed legal guidance as hindering or enabling their work. District administrators should ensure that legal guidance is structured to support principals, not to monitor their decision-making.

Personal Time Devalued. Hindering districts created structures that incentivized overwork or devalued efforts in professional growth.

Districts should not ignore the contribution of their structures to the taxing requirements of principalship. In their responses, the principals mentioned that informal

expectations about work completion, incentivizing overwork, and the lack of tuition reimbursement negatively influenced their personal lives. Districts that held the informal expectation that principals would always complete their tasks created an environment in which school leaders worked extended days, which often overlapped their personal lives. District policies compensating for unused personal leave incentivized principals to choose work over much-needed personal days. When districts refuse to reimburse tuition expenses, principals assume that the time and money spent on professional growth is not valued. Districts that do not recognize the importance of a principal's personal time cause school administrators to feel overworked and frustrated.

Unsolicited District Intervention. In hindering administrations, district leaders intervened in school building matters without explanations and without first consulting the principal.

Districts should not intervene in school-level affairs without explaining or consulting the principal. Although district leaders have the authority to intervene in school building issues, when it is done without principal input, school leaders feel that it undermines their authority. For example, the findings of the present study showed that when district leaders assigned mentors, intervened in school-level matters, and blocked routine purchase requests without consulting and explaining these actions to the principal, school leaders perceived that the district was hindering their work. Unsolicited district interventions interfered with the work of the school building leader. Such interventions led to additional time commitments, undermined the principal's authority, and created feelings of punishment and resentment.

Dismissive. In hindering administrations, district leaders ignored principals' input and disregarded their concerns.

Districts should not overlook the concerns expressed by school leaders even if they are problematic or seem exaggerated. In this study, the principals described district administrations that disregarded professional experience, left staffing requests unfulfilled, and ignored legal liability concerns, as unsupportive and unreliable. When experienced principals expressed concern, they expected district leaders to strongly consider their input. When such concerns were ignored or overruled without a rational explanation, the principals described the district as generating frustration and resentment among school leaders, obstructing school improvement efforts, and causing school administrators to resist and question district motives.

Hostile Environment. Hindering district administrations intentionally retaliated against less favorable school leaders.

Districts should not intentionally engage in punitive behavior toward school leaders. During the interviews, the participants described negative experiences of districts subjecting principals to irate parents, using their authority unfairly, and resorting to personal attacks. Principals will advocate, voice disagreement, and challenge administrators when they deem the actions of the district to be wrongheaded or unfair. While such actions may result in a contentious working relationship, the principal still believes there should be professionalism in the principal–district relationship. Districts that engage in petty, vindictive, and unprofessional behavior create a hostile work environment for school leaders.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study's methodology and findings present opportunities for future investigation. To collect quantitative data, the researcher utilized a modified version of the Enabling School Structure survey form, which was subsequently titled the Enabling District Structure (EDS) form, to collect the survey data. Although the EDS form was based on a valid and reliable instrument, further research is required to show that it is a viable and influential instrument. Repeating this study using diverse samples of principals would not only validate the findings of this study but also enhance the generalizability of the claims made about the EDS form.

The researcher restricted the scope of the study to measuring the perceptions of respondents who were school principals. The perspectives of district-level administrators or teachers in the respondents' schools were not included. Therefore, further research may develop a more thorough characterization of district structures by incorporating the perspectives of employees other than the principals in a school district. Accounting for the perspectives of various stakeholders may contribute to understanding the complex relationship between the district structure and the principal.

Moreover, the researcher did not consider the potential influence of the principals' personal characteristics, such as gender, race, or years of administrative experience, on their perceptions of hindering and enabling district structures, which could be explored in a further study. Similarly, the study did not consider the possible influence of district context variables, such as the school setting and the percentage of students who received a free or reduced-price lunch on EDS. The possible effects of these context variables on EDS could be examined in a future study.

One component of the related research highlighted the challenges faced by districts in retaining and recruiting quality principals. The findings of previous research indicate that job stress influences principals' decisions to remain in their position or seek a new one. In this study, the researcher found that sources of job stress were present in hindering district organizations. Further research is needed to determine the potential relationship between hindering and enabling bureaucracies and school leader recruitment and retention.

The researcher framed enabling school districts as beneficial to principals' efforts to improve schools and raise student achievement. Future studies could determine whether enabling administrations result in greater student achievement. The following questions could be addressed in a future study: When principals perceive their district as enabling their work, does that guarantee they are doing a better job? What specific changes in enabling districts are correlated with student achievement? Which behaviors and structures are the most effective?

The findings of this study demonstrated that the rules, behaviors, and structures of district administrations and administrators are decisive factors in whether principals are enabled or hindered in doing their jobs. Further research on this topic would help identify more rules, behaviors, and structures, as well as delineate the relationships among them and student achievement. The improvement of student achievement should guide future studies on enabling district administrations.

Final Thoughts

Prior research has demonstrated that school leadership has a meaningful influence on school improvement, school effectiveness, and indirectly, student achievement. As an

increasing number of schools have faced the challenges associated with principal recruitment and retention, the roles and responsibilities of the school district in addressing these concerns have received greater attention. In previous studies, effective principals of high-performing schools reported positive and supportive district relationships. Conversely, in low-performing schools, school leaders described negative and coercive interactions with the district organization. These findings support Weber's (1947) conclusion that the structure and design of bureaucratic organizations positively or negatively influence their members. This study sought to identify and understand the influence of school district structures on the role of the school principal. The researcher built on Hoy and Sweetland's (2001) work on enabling school structures to establish the construct of enabling district structure. The findings supported the researcher's prediction that enabling districts have discernible behaviors, rules, and structures that support the work of the school leader. Similarly, hindering districts exhibit distinctly different behaviors, rules, and structures, which impede the school principal. Based on the knowledge that enabling district structure is a viable construct and that there are identifiable enabling and hindering behaviors, rules, and structures in district bureaucracies, school districts would do well to implement the findings of this study in their efforts to become more enabling and supportive of principals. The need for districts to make the increasingly demanding job of principal more manageable is critical. The issues related to principal retention and turnover will not be resolved until the underlying issues in the position itself are addressed. This study sought to explore the meaningful constructs that influence the behavior of the principal based on the intention of easing the burden on school leaders.

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL MEMO

Date: 2-23-2021

IRB #: IRB-FY2020-58

Title: PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENABLING AND HINDERING BEHAVIORS AND STRUCTURES IN NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Creation Date: 8-9-2019

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Matt Darby

Review Board: St John's University Institutional Review Board

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial	Review Type Expedited	Decision Approved
--------------------------------	------------------------------	---------------------------------

Key Study Contacts

Member Barbara Cozza	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact cozzab@stjohns.edu
-----------------------------	---------------------------------------	-----------------------------------

Member Matt Darby	Role Principal Investigator	Contact matt.darby17@stjohns.edu
--------------------------	------------------------------------	---

Member Matt Darby	Role Primary Contact	Contact matt.darby17@stjohns.edu
--------------------------	-----------------------------	---

APPENDIX B

Enabling District Structure Survey

Enabling District Structure Survey

1. Which of the following best describes the area your school is located?_

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

2. Administrative rules in this district enable authentic communication between principals and district administrators.

- | Never | Once in a while | Sometimes | Fairly Often | Always |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |

3. In this district red tape is a problem

- | Never | Once in a while | Sometimes | Fairly Often | Always |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |

4. The administrative hierarchy of this district enables principals to do their job.

- | Never | Once in a while | Sometimes | Fairly Often | Always |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |

5. The administrative hierarchy obstructs student achievement.

- | Never | Once in a while | Sometimes | Fairly Often | Always |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |

6. Administrative rules help rather than hinder

- | Never | Once in a while | Sometimes | Fairly Often | Always |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |

7. The administrative hierarchy of this district facilitates the mission of the district.

- | Never | Once in a while | Sometimes | Fairly Often | Always |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |

8. Administrative rules in this district are guides to solutions rather than rigid procedures

- | Never | Once in a while | Sometimes | Fairly Often | Always |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |

9. Administrative rules in this district are used to punish principals.

Never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

10. The administrative hierarchy of this district obstructs innovation.

Never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

11. Administrative rules in this district are substitutes for professional judgment

Never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly often	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

12. In this district the authority of the superintendent is used to undermine principals.

Never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

13. The administrators in this district use their authority to enable principals to do their job.

Never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

14. To which gender do you most identify?

- Female
- Male
- Gender Variant/Non-Conforming
- Prefer not to answer
- Not listed (please specify)

15. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.)

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- White / Caucasian
- Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)

16. About how many years have you been in your current position?

- Less than 1 year
- At least 1 year but less than 3 years
- At least 3 years but less than 5 years
- At least 5 years but less than 10 years
- 10 years or more

17. What percent of students qualify for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) at your school?

- 0-25 percent
- 26-50 percent
- 51-75 percent
- 76-100 percent

18. Thank you for completing the Enabling District Structure Survey. You now have an opportunity to provide greater insight into how school district bureaucracy influences the role of the principal. The investigator is looking for principals to participate in a more in depth portion of the study. If you agree to participate in this research, the investigator will conduct a case study involving a phone interview with you, and an analysis of documents and artifacts you wish to provide. If you are interested in participating in further research please provide your email address in the text box below. By providing your email you give the investigator permission to contact you about participating in further research.

APPENDIX C



Interview Protocol

Participation in this interview is voluntary. The interview will be audio taped in order to transcribe it and you will have the opportunity to read the transcription and make any corrections or changes that you deem necessary. All materials are confidential, and the audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the study. You may end the interview at any time and request that the contents of the interview not be used in the study. The questions are designed to get your perceptions of enabling and hindering district administrative behaviors and structures.

The first five questions are concerned with the RULES of the district. (Rules can be understood as formal or informal procedures)

Q1. Enabling district administrations aid communications between principals and district administrators. In what ways do the rules in this district enable communications?

Q2. Rules can either aid principals in achieving their goals or hinder principals. In what ways do the rules in this district enable and in what ways might they hinder?

Q3. Rules may either serve as guides to problem solutions or be rigid barriers to problem solving. In what ways do rules in this district aid and in what ways do they act as red tape and inhibit problem solving.

Q4. Rules may be used to punish or to reward principals. In what ways are rules in this district used to punish, if they are, and in what ways are they used to reward principals?

Q5. District administrative rules can be used as substitutes for professional judgment. How are rules used in this way in this district, if that happens?

The next five questions are concerned with the HIERARCHY of the district.

Q6. Administrative hierarchy may be used to enable principals to do their jobs or to hinder principals in doing their jobs. In what ways does this district's hierarchy enable or hinder principals in doing their jobs?

Q7. District administrations are concerned with the mission of the district. In what ways, does this district's administration facilitate the mission of the district?

Q8. Individual administrators can use their authority in various ways. In this district, in what ways is administrative authority used to enable principals to do their jobs and in what ways is authority used to undermine principals, if that happens?

Q9. Student achievement is the main goal of districts. In what ways does the administration aid in attaining student achievement and in what ways might it obstruct achievement?

Q10. In what ways does the administration of this district support and encourage innovation and in what ways might it obstruct innovation?

Q11. Now we come to the less structured portion of the interview. I would like to hear what is on your mind. If you do not have any particular thoughts at first, consider what policies or rules you would like to see or what rules would you never want to see. You might share what your feelings are about certain rules, procedures, or structures in this district. Perhaps you know of some rules that are considered enabling by some principals in the district and hindering by others.

APPENDIX D

LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM WAYNE K. HOY

Re: Permission to use Enabling School Structure form



Wayne Hoy <whoy@mac.com>

Sat 10/20, 2:18 PM

Matt W. Darby



Inbox

You replied on 10/25/2018 8:36 PM.

| Action Items

Dear Matt—

You have my permission to use and adapt the Enabling Structure Scale as specified in you email.

Good luck with you work. And please send a copy of the completed research study.

Wayne

Wayne K. Hoy
Fawcett Professor Emeritus in
Education Administration
The Ohio State University
www.waynekhoy.com

7655 Pebble Creek circle, #301
Naples, FL 34108
Email: whoy@mac.com
Phone: 239 595 5732

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent

Dear Principal:

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the extent to which New York State, public school principals perceive their district's behaviors rules and structures to be hindering and/or enabling their work. This study will be conducted by Matt Darby, Administration and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University. This research is being conducted as part of his doctoral dissertation. His faculty sponsor is Dr. Barbara Cozza, School of Education, Administration and Instructional Leadership. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete a short, 17 question survey about your background and school district bureaucracy.
2. Indicate if you would like to participate in the 2nd portion of the study.

You are being invited to participate in this research because you are a public school, principal in the New York State. Your answers are very important to help yield a scientifically valid analysis of the information the investigator is collecting.

Participation in the survey portion of the study will involve approximately 3 minutes of your time. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator better understand the extent to which school district bureaucracies influence the work of New York State principals. Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained. Results of this survey will be reported in the aggregate, and your identity and answers will remain anonymous and completely confidential. No names, email addresses, IP addresses or other identifying information will be collected, reported, or stored.

While your participation in filling out this survey is completely voluntary, I would greatly appreciate your assistance in exploring this important topic. The link below will lead you to the survey which utilizes a Likert Scale format. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer or discontinue the survey at any time.

Clicking on the link to complete the survey will serve as your consent to participate.

I hope you will be willing to complete the survey at your earliest convenience. If you require any further information about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact me at (914) 494-4322 or email Matt.Darby17@stjohns.edu. You may also contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Barbara Cozza at (718) 990-1569 or cozzab@stjohns.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the university's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718- 990-1440.

Sincerely,

Matt Darby

Doctoral Student

St. John's University

APPENDIX F



Case Study Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how NYS school district bureaucracies influence the work of elementary and middle grade principals. The investigator is asking you to take part because you volunteered to participate in the qualitative portion of the study after taking the previously emailed survey. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to 1) examine the extent to which NYS school district structures are perceived as hindering or enabling to principals, 2) identify hindering and enabling behaviors, rules and structures of the district bureaucracy, and 3) examine how the identified behaviors, rules and structures hinder and enable the work of school principals.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to participate in this research, the investigator will conduct a case study involving an interview with you, and an analysis of documents and artifacts you wish to provide. The interview will include questions about your school district bureaucracy and its impact on your job. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, the investigator would also like to audio-record the interview. You will also be asked to provide documents and artifacts that reflect the district bureaucracy and its influence on your work. These documents will be analyzed after the interview.

Risks and benefits: The investigator does not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

There are no benefits to you. The job of the principal is a very demanding position and this study hopes to learn more about the influence of district structures on your role as a school leader.

Compensation: There is no compensation for your participation

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In publishing his dissertation, the investigator will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the investigator will have access to the records. The audio recorded interview, and documents/artifacts will be destroyed after they have been transcribed analyzed and coded. The investigator anticipates this will be within 3 months of collecting the data.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: If you require any further information about this study, please do not hesitate to contact the investigator at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email Matt.Darby17@stjohns.edu. You may also contact the investigators doctoral advisor, Dr. Barbara Cozza at (718) 990-1569 or cozzab@stjohns.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718- 990-1440.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview audio recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

APPENDIX G

Interview Transcripts Principal One (Hindering)

Darby:

Okay. So participation in this interview is voluntary. The interview will be audio recorded to transcribe it, and you will have the opportunity to read the transcription and make any corrections or changes that you deem necessary. All materials are confidential and the audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study. You may end the interview at any time and request that the contents of the interview not be used in the study. The questions are designed to get your perceptions of enabling and hindering district administrative behaviors and structures.

Darby:

So the first five questions are concerned with the rules of the district. Rules can be understood as formal or informal procedures.

Darby:

So question one. Enabling district administrations aid communications between principals and district administrators. In what ways do the rules in this district enable communication?

Principal 1:

I would have to say the rules pretty much disable communication.

Darby:

Okay.

Principal 1:

We might be in an administrative counsel with all the administrators in the district. And if the administrator would ask the question and kind of be shot down for asking the question. So a lot of people have learned not to ask questions. Or if an email is sent and an answer needs to be made more often than not the emails remain unanswered. So after a while the building level principals have learned not to see central office people as someone who is supportive or helpful.

Darby:

Okay. Question two. Rules can either aid principals in achieving their goals or hinder principals. In what ways do the rules in this district enable? And in what ways might they hinder?

Principal 1:

Okay. It's interesting the word "rules", because... Especially, I've worked in a very big district and now I'm working in a very small district. So things a lot of times are a lot less formal, you know there are rules that are formal or informal. They're more informal.

Darby:

Right. They're understood as... It can be understood as norms. Right. There's norms within a district.

Principal 1:

Yeah. It's probably, in my mind if I take a bit, so I have to say the rules actually hinder what we do as a building principal. And I'll give you an example and I don't know if this is going to be a good example. I'll give you an example of what we work with day in and day out. I got, I guess the norms that there in your office, why to hold what we want to hear and then something else happened. So I got nominated for... It was principal of the year through the elementary national association and my superintendent signed the nomination form and then called up Albany and the awards committee to say that he would not endorse me. They called me from Albany and said, "Did you know?" I said "No I just signed the nomination packet." So when you had to deal with that kind of, I mean, I just feel and every week he and the assistant superintendent and the other assistant superintendent go out of their way to hinder things. So as I say, I don't know if that's a great example or not but it kind of sets the tone what we're dealing with.

Darby:

Sure. Question three rules may either serve as guides to problem solutions or be rigid barriers to problem solving. In what ways do the rules in this district aid in? And in what ways do they act as red tape and inhibit problem solving?

Principal 1:

He calls it the culture that's within the administrative team being in a small district. So altogether all the administration there's probably about 10 people. And there is a lack of trust, that has come to be with this particular central office staff. I think it's just a barrier to act cohesively, being the same page, to deliver the same message, to trust each other. So I would say that the rules prevents a lot of barriers from happening. Like one principal might be told "Yes, you could have funding to pay for this." Another principal who is a target, like me, is told "nope we don't do that," Well yes you do. You just did it for the other building. So it's a misuse of rules and it's just, it's a barrier for us moving forward.

Darby:

Okay. Question four. Rules may be used to punish or reward principals. On what ways have the rules in this district used to punish if they are, and in what ways are they use to reward principals?

Principal 1:

There's no rewards unless in public, like in a public setting. For example, I didn't even hear from my superintendent when I finished my doctorate because I had no respect for him, I don't care if he knows or not. And he put it in a district newsletter and congratulated me and referred to me as Doctor. Now he got mad that I outed him on what he did as far as calling up Albany, I told the parents that had to write me letters, and the teachers. So I wrote to all of them and said that thanks for nominating me, thanks for writing me those letters, but the superintendent call up and said he would not nominate me. So he writes me up. And I just find it really interesting that in his write up he referred to me as Ms. And refused to use my title. But publicly when he refers to me he will say Doctor. So it was just interesting find it punishing, it's a lot of issues of power and behind the scenes and it's sad, but I hope I'm answering questions right.

Darby:

You're doing fine, this is great.

Principal 1:

And what's frustrating to all of us principals is that, we will often hear, the assistant superintendent might just not even invite us or tell us, but meet with a team of our teachers, and then we're hearing plans, I'm hearing plans of a roll-out of a new curriculum from a teacher. I'm not even hearing from them. We're kind of kept out of the process, and I do not know if I want to help if they need help.

Principal 1:

So, and with my job, one of the most important things for me is to try to keep that toxic mess from seeping into... I mean, we've got a beautiful setup here. I have a K-1 building. We have great kids, it's a great age. A lot of happiness, smiles, and the staff are just amazing, amazing people. But they, you know. They hear one thing from the assistant superintendent, but she said this. I go, "Well, she told me to do this." So I try to be transparent with my staff, and so they, as a result, their confused, and it's hard. It is hard.

Darby:

Okay, we're getting through the rules part. So next question is, district administrative rules can be used as substitutes for professional judgment. How are rules used in this way in the district, if that happens?

Principal 1:

Okay. I could probably give two examples. When you talk about professional judgment, I had an intern getting his administrative degree under me this year. Great guy. He was a teacher in the district for years, just a nice person, knew his stuff, wants to learn. And there was a special ed student who... And I know it's hard to believe, there's like five and six year old kid, but who was head butting and giving staff concussions. We just didn't

have the resources to help this kid the way he needed to be helped. And basically in a special ed program, all the other kids in there were getting injured. And this kid just, this kid would just get up on... They had to take everything out of the room. There was a shelf, and he would get up on there. He'd run back and forth, it's very dangerous. And I wasn't in the building at the time, so the administrative intern asked the superintendent, "I don't know what to do. I mean, can we just let this kid continuously run back and forth? What's up with this?" The assistant superintendent said, "Well, if the parents are okay with it, yeah."

Principal 1:

And when he told me that, the administrative intern, I said, "Absolutely not." I said, "This kid falls and slashes his head, guess who's going to be"... And he looked it up in one of his law books, and said, "Oh yeah." But her professional judgment was that it was dead wrong, and she can't admit that she's ever wrong. She's the one who, we did a test of kids in the special ed program that belong in a much, much more restricted program. And she's telling me, "Oh gosh, you're just not following the practice of getting these kids in there." I mean, I used to be director of special ed in this district, so I might know a thing or two.

Principal 1:

And, I said, myself, the school psychologist, and social worker are spending 98% of our time with 2% of our population. And we've had the security guards having to put these kids in restraints, these kids have been in mental institutions. And, you know they said to me that "you want to send these kids out to BOCES, but they're all of our kids. You can't do that. And it's her professional judgment, because she's in a higher ranking power than mine, trumps everything, and as a result, I have staff getting hurt, kids not getting services that they need, because we're all tied up in crisis pretty much all day long. Because her professional judgment is it. It overrules mine, it overrules everyone else's. And that's that.

Darby:

So question six is, the administrative hierarchy may be used to enable principals to do their jobs, or to hinder principals and doing their jobs. In what ways does this district's hierarchy enable or hinder principals in doing their jobs?

Principal 1:

They hinder principals by not supporting them. We had one principal that had parents come in, and the superintendent was there. The principal said, "I'm not comfortable sitting in with these parents; they're very hostile. I'm not comfortable. I don't think it's good that I sit here". And he made her sit in, and then a mother and a father swore at her, degraded her for about, I don't know, half an hour or so. And the superintendent just sat there, and let that continue on. Told her how horrible she was, she ended up retired. Very talented, but she just this last year said, "I can't do this anymore". So they definitely hinder principals by doing things; by either not supporting, doing nothing, or not trusting

their professional judgment, thinking they know more. They really care about the kids, we don't. I mean, so they definitely hinder it.

Darby:

Okay. Question seven, district administrators are concerned with the mission of the district. In what ways does the district administration facilitate the mission of the district?

Principal 1:

Probably one of the few good thing about being with this current administration is, they, with the board, kind of realigned the education goals, to make them... In the past their board of education goals were very SMART. They were very, you know talked about test scores, talked about the black and white thing, you either made it or you didn't. Now we became more about educating the whole child, and not have a test score attached to them. And we talked about creative way to reach academic staff development through hands-on learning, or PDL learning. So it was a big shift there wasn't an inquiry based anything. So they set the tone for that, which was good. But their tone is so toxic that it could have been a lot better

Darby:

Okay. Getting there. Question eight, individual administrators can use their authority in various ways. In this district, in what ways is administrative authority used to enable principals to do their job? And in what ways is authority used to undermine principals, if that happens?

Principal 1:

Are you saying the district office authority?

Darby:

Exactly. Yeah. Central office authority; superintendent, deputy superintendents. Yeah. District. How is their authority used to enable or hinder-

Principal 1:

District office authority relies on their own hierarchy to make things happen. Personally, I'm a collaborator. I've got some of the most creative idea from custodians. I mean, I-

Principal 1:

It's not about who's on top. It's kind of hearing everyone's ideas and then talking it through and coming up with the solution. This particular administration uses their power to try to force things to happen. The assistant superintendent, her curriculum believes that doing this wing block that she did as a principal was the end-all be-all for everyone so that if you're not doing it, then you're not doing what's right for kids.

Principal 1:

I think of the assistant superintendent for business blocking a lot of things that might be getting ... like ordering. One time, I wanted a big-screen, flat-screen TV for the cafeteria. I'd arrange dates, booked the labs, for kids watch movies. He blocked that, yet he got one big one for his office to put in there. I just look at you're using your power ... You're not trusting my judgment as the building principal to say, "I need this."

Principal 1:

The superintendent started a mental health committee. Or not ... facilitated. Not really started it. If the teacher's there, then he kind of facilitated it. One of the things was, which I was always for in my building was to have teachers supported and helped ... maybe in the bathrooms, like how you have ordered... nice hand soap, and maybe little packets of Advil, and nice soaps. Just something to do... whatever. Do little things like that to help staff perception. And every two, three years, I would always order hand soap, not the soap that comes out of the soap dispensers, now I'd get blocked. "Get rid of it. You're not allowed to order any more."

Principal 1:

Out of nowhere. There's no rule on it. It's the building budget that you assigned to me, I've never went over my building budget and you're going to tell me now that this is something I can't order because you just decided it's not frugal. We had a new teacher start here. The assistant superintendent allotted a desk for her. The desk, welcome to the district, we're going to get you a new desk, we're setting up an extra bathroom, and he had to revert over for another building and washed it... that had no business being in storage. Why would you store something like that? That's how you're going to say "Welcome to the district, here's your rusty desk, here's your file cabinet from the 1970s that's rusted and the doors don't shut right, from storage." Are you serious, really? I've had enough. Stuff like that, using your power in a way that's just not right.

Darby:

Okay. Question nine. Student achievement is the main goal of the districts. In what ways does the administration aid in attaining student achievement, and in what ways might it obstruct achievement?

Principal 1:

Well right now, our school district is...and I know in every school it's money, I know the money thing. I don't know how much you know about the survey of...they call it the RTI, it's about student intervention. It's supposed to be helping student achievement and it's a mathematical formula. So, basically it says that maybe five percent of your population is going to need a lot, a lot of support every day for a half hour. Well, five percent of my population turns out to be about fifteen kids. If you took fifteen kids in my building that needed more than most of the population, that is more than what one teacher can do.

Principal 1:

And then you have to keep to, kind of a schedule. And the fifteen percent, maybe you do them two to three times a week. We have one AIS reading teacher here. So we don't even have enough to cover what we need to. And every year I ask, with that mathematical formula, here's what other districts have. And I bring them the data, from...this is what other districts are working with, more teachers to cover more kids. I will say that something good about the district office is that we did change our ELA curriculum, which is supposed to, which time will tell, it's supposed to help more kids have a better curriculum. That's part of sponsored intervention is having that readily available to our kids. But there's still a percentage of kids that need a lot, a lot of support, and we don't have it, and we're being charged with, what are you doing with those kids that need support every day for a half hour?

Darby:

Right. Okay. Last structured question, and then we have one unstructured to go. Question ten, in what ways has the administration of this district support and encourage innovation, and in what ways might it obstruct innovation?

Principal 1:

I will say that they try to support, at least they try to support and encourage innovation. Inquiry learning, is a big question. That's all about innovation. The expeditionary learning curriculum that we adopted in k-6 is all about innovation. They support it, started by one of the principals here, which at first they were...I think it was a personal thing against the principal. But it's a wonderful program, it's the Positivity Project, that's now done district-wide. And they do support and encourage that, and that is... it's like a character ed program. It's based on research, it talks about...I'm usually not one of those people that jump on new educational bandwagons, this is real. The positivity project is, like I said it's based on research, and it's kind of a grassroots movement that's happening throughout the country and I'm really happy to see it. So they support and encourage outwardly, like that, but I would say behind the scenes some of the toxic and unethical things that they do is the direct opposite of what they are wanting students to do. And that's really sad.

Darby:

We'd just like to hear what's on your mind, and if you do not have any particular thoughts at first, consider what policies or rules you would like to see, or rules you would never like to see. You might share what your feelings are about certain rules, procedures or structures in this district. Perhaps you know of some other rules that are considered enabling by some principals in the district, or enabling by others.

Principal 1:

I just firmly believe, and I think I told you I was, maybe in the beginning I started to allude to...that my first time working with people who make it to the top, that are toxic...I can't...like I said I almost feel like in some ways like I'm doing something wrong. How or

what...I truly believe that if you are a good person, you will be a good leader. And I can't even allude to some of the other stuff that has happened in seven years of this administration that has happened that has just been so awfulso toxic, so...I have to make someone So I have to like someone in order to trust them and follow their lead. And that's what I need in my relationship. Are you going to be liked by everyone? No. But you do your best to bring out the good in people.

Principal 1:

This administration... Before this administration came on, all of the administrators used to have holiday parties, we used to go out together, we used to socialize, it's so broken. So if you have that from the inside, and yet we're charged with going out in the world, to make the world a better place by educating our kids.

Principal 1:

I often believe that a lot of people, and I'm an administrator, I face it about myself. But, a lot of people go into be a principal they have issues, they want the power. I remember working with someone side by side who said no to someone just because they had the power to say no to someone.

Principal 1:

I said, "Why would you say no to that person?" "They didn't give the five days notice." I said "Well, what's that to you though?" That's so emotional, I don't know what you call it, but... Why don't you build this person up so that they want to help out with things? First and then... Some of them, "Oh you didn't ask for your request five days in advance." It doesn't hurt you, it doesn't hurt me, it doesn't hurt the kid, and it's probably going to make that person feel better about their job. So why did you say no? Because you had the power to say no, that's why? There's too many of those kind of people that can't get too positions of authority. And it's disheartening, and maddening, and I don't know what else to say. So, I think that the necessity from inside the leader, to permeate to run the organization.

APPENDIX H

Interview Transcripts Principal Two (Enabling)

Matt Darby:

Okay. So participation in this interview is voluntary. The interview will be audio recorded to transcribe it and you will have the opportunity to read the transcription and make any corrections or changes that you deem necessary. All materials are confidential and the audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study. You may end the interview at any time and request that the contents of the interview not be used in the study. Questions are designed to get your perceptions of enabling and hindering district administrative behaviors and structures. The first five questions are concerned with the rules of the district. Rules can be understood as formal or informal procedures. Okay, question one. Enabling district administrations aid communications between principals and district administrators. In what ways do the rules in this district enable communication?

Principal 2:

I would say both the formal and informal guide to our district is that we're expected to do our work and we're expected to do it to the best of our ability and to always keep our superiors informed of decisions and movements within the district that will reach their level and somehow walk the gray line of education. So we have people or we have decisions that we have to make that aren't really black letter law, like obviously, like this kid is transferring in and needs to get this credit for that work. So many decisions are not that clear cut or many situations. So really the unspoken and spoken expectation is that I keep my superiors informed whenever I have those gray decisions. So really my rule of thumb is that if I feel like he might get a call, whether it's because someone's going over my head or because the decision I gave a parent is not... Or another person doesn't make them happy. He doesn't like to be surprised. None of my superiors do. He then keeps the Board informed. So anything that's happening along the way, the only time that I've ever been given any kind of what's going on here is when I didn't make the call ahead of time to say "Hey, this is what's happening."

Principal 2:

So if it's out of the norm, I'm expected to communicate. Quite frankly, that has opened me up to being more forthright with things that are anywhere in the gray. So even if it was not something he would get a call from, I feel open to have a discussion with him and bounce ideas and the general expectation is that I will listen and heed his advice, but not necessarily take it if I don't feel it's the best course of action. I'm repeatedly told this is my school and ironically he works in my building. All of central office is located in my building, which for a lot of people would be... Quite frankly when I took the job I was concerned about it. Would there be micromanaging and the like. But I would say quite the opposite has taken place. I think he makes a conscious effort not to come by unless it's necessary and I will often go visit his office or whatever or the assistant

superintendent. But the general expectation is that we each do our own jobs. So the rules of the game are you follow the law obviously, you follow district policy, and you keep them informed whenever those lines get blurred.

Matt Darby:

Got you. Thank you. Question two. Rules can either aid principals in achieving their goals or hinder principals. In what ways do the rules in this district enable and in what ways might they hinder?

Principal 2:

I think as I suggested before, they are enabling in that they give me the freedom to have discretion. I see rules as kind of a weird thing especially for administrators. Rules are things or edicts that we're meant to adhere to because they're part of our job. I mean, I would say that we're expected... A rule is that you treat everybody with respect. That's a common decency thing. I don't think there are any rules that exist in our district that aren't really about common courtesy. The one thing that is unusual about this district that I inherited, that is a little bit hindering at times, but not too much so, it's really for our protection, is that we really have to call legal on every correspondence or call that deals with suspension matters, which is unusual for a district. So if we're suspending a student out of school, we must get it approved by legal. We must have the letter. They have to see the letter, they have to approve it. Which can be a hindrance to the process.

Principal 2:

So if I have a student who gets in a fight during the last period of the day and I don't want that student back the next five days, the process of getting legal to approve that might not happen in the time I need it to. So I have to kind of create this alternative. That hasn't happened too often, but I would say that's the one hindrance we have. That legal hindrance, I know has come about from a history of the district being burned legally by lawsuits and stuff like that. So the board decided before my time, which is probably about five or six years ago now, that every decision that was made that impacts discipline in particular, like major discipline, and even stuff that involves anything that's a legal matter. So if I have a situation where a parent is questioning their right to whether or not they get to choose if they're going to have virtual instruction or not for example, that starts to become a legal matter. We have a situation going on with a DASA investigation that happened over the summer. So we consult legal for that because is an incident that happens off campus over the summer it's our responsibility to investigate.

Principal 2:

So we go to legal to answer those questions so that we have it. So that we're not crossing any lines that we're not supposed to be. So that would be the only way to hinder. In every other way, I find that the rules end up protecting administration from any kind of harm that might come our way. And situations arise all the time where legalities are called into question and dotting those I's and crossing those T's have been an advantage for us.

Matt Darby:

Right. Right. Okay, question three. Rules might either serve as guides to problem solutions or be rigid barriers to problem solving. In what ways do rules in this district aid and what ways do they act as red tape and inhibit problem solving?

Principal 2:

So I would say the only way that they inhibit is kind of the way I just alluded to before. With that legal piece, sometimes that legal piece can be a little bit tedious, especially if it's something that it's kind of straightforward. Like it's a fight in school or a kid is in possession of marijuana or something like that. Those are pretty straightforward situations, but because... Like marijuana thing might go to a superintendent's hearing. We want to make sure that legal's informed so that when that paperwork comes into play they have knowledge of every step of the way. So many of the commissioner's cases that have been overturned deal with due process and due process not being followed and that's where the legal comes in. So that's the way that that can be a little bit of a red tape thing that's frustrating. But again, just somewhat necessary.

Principal 2:

But other than that I don't see rules as being... They haven't been burdensome. There's really very little that my superintendent expects of us that I don't expect already of myself. And I don't know if the benefit of that is because we have similar philosophies about what good work is and expectations. So therefore, following the rules, I'm not told that I have to be in work before students get here and leave after they leave. That's just kind of something that I do and there's nothing in our contract that stipulates these are the hours you have to be at work, because quite frankly, sometimes I'm working until 10:00 at night. I think the idea that he doesn't put things in writing that way or the board doesn't either, it's both liberating and confining because then that means where I end my day is up to me, however sometimes that can overlap where my life ends and work begins and vice versa, becomes a little bit muddled. And that was especially true during virtual instruction. Where really my day would be 15, 16 hours long easily and just didn't seem to end. And again, there was no stipulated requirement, but there was just a lot of things to get done. So really the rule being get your work done is loaded, especially for a principal. But I think that's probably a universal trait.

Matt Darby:

Question four. Rules may be used to punish or to reward principals. In what ways are rules in this district used to punish, if they are and in what ways are they used to reward principals?

Principal 2:

You know, the only instance where I've ever felt punished were situations that were coming down from the board. So they were more evaluative in nature. So they felt, for example, that I had to work on I guess levels of communication with them and just kind

of the warm and fuzzy of principalship. So as a result, they gave me in my third year, a mentor, which I felt was kind of strange. And although it was intended to be educational it was also an incredible time suck for me. I probably spent a good 25, 30 hours working with this mentor during the school year, which although she was wonderful and assisted me in a lot of ways and I appreciated her feedback because she was much more experienced than I am. It was something that came about because the board felt I wasn't meeting some unnamed expectation. It kind of came out of the blue because this was not something... so I don't know that that's a rule. I guess that was more of an informal rule that has been broken.

Principal 2:

There's also another situation where there was a legal case that came about that a teacher, because I had written her up for something she had done a few years ago, she wrote a rebuttal that claimed that because I had called her in a couple of other times for things she had been saying inaccurately to students and then had this meeting, that I was looking to threaten her. In that instance the district hired an outside lawyer to investigate. And I felt it was weird. I mean, I guess I understood the conflict of interest because if central office investigates me and finds that I did nothing wrong will it be questioned by the Teachers Union as not doing enough to create objectivity. But it felt weird that I was put in that situation when I kept everybody informed that I was supposed to keep informed every step of the way. Again, I don't know if that really answers the question you're asking. But those are the only two times that I really felt punished in a way that linked in any way to rules.

Principal 2:

Other than that, I do feel that the rules protect and support what I'm doing on a day to day basis and allow me to have the support I need whether I'm dealing with an irate parent or a challenging teacher or a student disciplinary situation.

Matt Darby:

Last part for the rules. Last question. District administrative rules can be used as substitutes for professional judgment. How are the rules used in this way in this district if that happens?

Principal 2:

I don't really think that does happen. I don't think there's ever a situation with my superintendent or assistant superintendent where rules are followed for their own sake. If there is an issue that arises that doesn't fit, that's in that gray zone that I talked about earlier, I do feel like we have productive discussions to say why is that appropriate here and do we need to change a course of action. So I never feel like rules are there for their own sake. And I feel like if there is a rule that's antiquated or needs readjustment that we're given full say.

Principal 2:

I mean, just case in point, I was the lead administrator for the rewriting of the district code of conduct, which to me is a district level, central office... And even in terms of the district's central office rules. I just... It doesn't happen that we've ever had a situation where something was done and we just had to follow it because that was the rule.

Matt Darby:

So the next five questions are concerned with the hierarchy of the district. Administrative hierarchy may be used to enable principals to do their job or to hinder principals in doing their job. In what ways does the district's hierarchy enabling or hindering principals in doing their jobs?

Principal 2:

I feel very much that our district is a team approach to leadership. While there are instances where the superintendent makes the final decision for things or the assistant superintendent for that matter, I would say it's almost always in consultation with the other administrators in the district and with me. If there is something we disagree on we'll talk it out until we understand both sides. At some point sometimes decisions have to be made. That's why they paid the money they get paid and they take responsibility for that decision as well. So I've never felt like the hierarchy has been used to somehow squash my ability to do my job on the building level.

Principal 2:

There have been a couple of minor times where the superintendent politically decided to become a part of a discussion that I think made him the center... Not the center, but I don't know. He became the focal point. So if you have somebody who is the superintendent in the room and you're having a discussion with kids, then they're directing their questions to him. So it made it seem- and I don't think this was his intention, it just kind of the perception that it ended up- it made it seem that he was there to keep me and the teachers in check. And that wasn't his intention at all, it was just the perception that was given. But it was a situation that had gotten to his level, so he didn't have a choice in the matter. It wasn't like something he decided to get involved in out of the blue. It was something that had taken up a good deal of his time and the board's time already and the board wanted him involved.

Principal 2:

But I don't see that as him overstepping his hierarchy or the hierarchy of the district. I just felt it as it was kind of a necessary situation, it just had an unfortunate consequence of making it look like I wasn't on board with everything that was happening, when in fact we had discussions every step of the way.

Matt Darby:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. Question seven. District administrators are concerned with the mission of the district. In what ways does the district's administration facilitate the mission of the district?

Principal 2:

They really help to organize all professional development. They help to support the principals in seeing through the grunt work so to speak, of fulfilling those missions. So I would say that they expect when we're creating building missions or initiatives in the school that they're going to be in line with district initiatives, however all of those district initiatives were built by our administrative team from Pre-K to 12 administrators. We don't really have missions or goals of the district that are outside the philosophy of people who are here. Now, one of the added benefits of our district is that our superintendent has hired all but one of the administrators in the district since his time here. He's been here I think five years and every one of us is hired by him. So that allows us to kind of be on the same page as him, not because we're not tenured I think so much as I think he hired with his own philosophy in mind. So he chose people who he felt would align with what he believed in and I think that helps. So if you get to choose the people you have on board you're going to choose people who are less likely to be very oppositional. So I think we all are similar in our philosophies and that that has helped.

Matt Darby:

Interesting. Yeah. Okay. Question eight. Individual administrators can use their authority in various ways. In this district, in what ways is administrative authority used to enable principals to do their jobs and in what ways is authority used to undermine principals, if that happens?

Principal 2:

I think that the superintendent in particular will look to support us in our decisions. If a situation arises that comes to his attention he will always ask us for our input first. Like, let's say somebody skipped coming to me and went right to him, which does happen, and I will say that doesn't always make me happy when people go right to him. He will always listen to a parent speak, but then he will often send them back to us. But he will also always get our input on the situation first. So if something comes to his desk and he's like what is this, he has that discussion ahead of time so that he's fully informed. To me, that makes it feel like at least I know that he has my side of the story and he's not going to look to undermine me in any way. What was the original question again? I'm losing track of what the original question was.

Matt Darby:

It was just how individual administrators use their authority.

Principal 2:

Oh okay, yeah. So I don't think that he or the assistant superintendent really use their authority in any way except to kind of support the movement of the district in the direction we all see as productive. So again, because we're constantly having discussions about what's best, I think that we're very much on the same page. So even if something nuance, like a small decision isn't necessarily in line with what we would do, big picture is always kind of same. So it's kind of like sometimes the means to the end might be slightly different, but never in a way that is undermining of the authority that I have. It's usually all kind of building on one another. So if I make a decision that I think might not be in line with what the assistant superintendent or superintendent might have intended with their mission or with their goals or with the stated objective, then I call them and I say "Hey, I'm thinking about making this decision. Do you see any issues with it that I'm not anticipating?" Usually we have a productive discussion and sometimes they'll give me an angle that I hadn't considered before or it's just a matter or let's hold off, let's not make any decision right now because there are other factors or other constituents we need to get involved.

Matt Darby:

Question nine. Student achievement is the main goal of districts. In what ways does the administration aid in attaining student achievements and in what ways might it obstruct achievement?

Principal 2:

I don't think it obstructs achievement in any way. Our constant philosophy is what is best for the students. That is always going to be the guiding force of our decision. And although sometimes there's a question of whether doing what's best for adults is the best thing to do for students, like sometimes we can differ in that, I don't think that they've ever done anything that isn't really what's best for students. And I think that that's always at the heart of the things that we're setting out to do each day. So we want to make sure they're getting the richest possible education, that there is fairness in how we're delivering and our expectations and in the opportunities afforded to students. And in our district it's really nuanced because we have an incredibly large military population. We have over 50% of our students are students that come from a military base. So we have a very transient population. So sometimes what's best for most students is even difficult to ascertain because most students aren't here for four years. So we're an unusual place, at least on the 9-12 level. But we still try to make choices and decisions that we think will be advantageous to kids in whatever their time here may be.

Matt Darby:

Question 10. In what ways does the administration of this district support and encourage innovation and in what ways might it obstruct innovation?

Principal 2:

I think it's great in terms of supporting innovation. Our voice is an equal voice. And although we don't make final decisions sometimes, one of the things I learned from my

superintendent is when I call him about something I would say that 98% of the time his response is yes, let's find a way to do that. Even if it costs money. His goal is to kind of find ways to be innovative, whether that's curricularly, whether that's through discipline, whether that's through social emotional learning. We want to be ahead of the game and not catching up. So he is willing to be self-reflective as an individual and as an educator and I think he expects the same of us. That's liberating because it invites us to bring in new ideas and sometimes they won't work, but the availability of the discussion is there. That makes for a sense of strength that we have and that we have a voice in what goes on. I think that enables... It builds on the support we have for one another.

Matt Darby:

Okay. And then this is the last question. So now we come to the less structured portion of the interview. I would like to hear what is on your mind. If you do not have any particular thoughts at first, consider what policies or rules you would like to see or rules you would never want to see. You might share what your feelings are about certain rules, procedures, or structures in the district, perhaps you know of some rules that are considered enabling by some principals in the district and hindering by others.

Principal 2:

I mean I would say like I said before, I feel like we have very much a team attitude and approach. Sometimes I feel like our contract isn't quite as freeing as it could be. Like I feel like we should have more vacation days afforded to us that we can use. We're given monetary compensation for vacation days that aren't used. And while there is a perk to that, there's also a drawback in that we're not the highest paid district around, so there is this incentive to overwork. So I would say that's something that is reflective of my superintendent's philosophy. That's something that... That's my own personal choice. But sometimes it's nice to have those structures outside of us. They kind of don't make that available and allow us to take the time we need without feeling like okay, I'm choosing between money and sanity. So I would say that would be the only thing...

Principal 2:

I also don't think that they compensate for advanced education enough. Those are two. And that's a union thing though. That's a contractual thing. I don't know. Again, I guess that's within the realm of rules. So I do feel like the district is a little bit short-sided. That's probably a little bit the superintendent and the board and also the legal angle of things and not wanting to give up too much. That doesn't thrill me. But outside of that, I do feel like I'm working in a good district that allows me to be as creative as I want to be but doesn't let me sit on my laurels either, doesn't let me stay still if things can be better. So it's nice to have that subtle push for growth, but not being this insane, top down... Because I've been in districts like that where there's a new initiative every six months. That was the case when I first got here. I had a discussion with my superintendent saying initiative fatigue is a real thing and I think we're pushing for too much too quickly. And he listened. So that's really a nice... That was a nice feeling to know that while it's great to

have ideas, ideas have times and contexts and he understands that and doesn't see it as out of line for me to give him honest feedback.

Principal 2:

And I would say every person is different. My assistant superintendent is not quite the same as him. I think if she were the superintendent she would feel a little differently about challenging points of view. She accepts them, but not quite as readily as he does. So I would be more hesitant to give her a challenging point of view than him because the test of time has shown me that he really does sincerely hear that critique and take it into consideration even if he chooses to go a different route in the end.

Principal 2:

So I think rules really are about... And then I have another assistant superintendent in charge of business who is extremely rule orientated, to the point of being crippling. Part of that is legalities too. She's dealing with auditing of the business transactions in the district. Sometimes I don't think that she always sees instruction as the number one driving force of why we spend money. Hers is about numbers. This has been true by the way, of almost every business official I've dealt with. I've been in 11 school districts and I don't think I've had a business official who has been really focused on instruction. They've been focusing on money. So I think sometimes their rules are blind to the humanity of what a school is. So if during the pandemic we couldn't get every students' signature for a deposit for a student club, should we find a way around that? My answer to that would be absolutely. I mean, we're in an extreme situation, we have to think of some other way to do this. And her answer is absolutely not. You have to do it that way.

Principal 2:

So to me, those kinds of rules are rules for their own sake and almost power hungry rules. She is not my direct supervisor. Obviously I answer to her for budget. So I think that's probably why I haven't spoken about her prior to now because I don't see her as part of my day to day interaction. Though I will say that sometimes with financial decisions I have to make, she does put up obstacles and she is not someone who is into hearing any kind of other points of view. She can be kind of nasty in the way she deals with people. Not always with me, but definitely with teachers and the like. So I often have to clean up her mess because she is so black and white with the rules.

Principal 2:

I've worked for assistant superintendents and superintendents who were all about rules and were about power. That's just not where my superintendent, luckily, comes from. He's just not. I mean, obviously you don't cross him. I wouldn't dare to embarrass him in public or be contrary to his point of view in public. That to me, I think for him, that's an expectation and maybe a rule. If you have an issue, you tell him well before we're in a public forum. Like when we're out and about, we're a unified front. When we're behind closed doors we can lay it out on the table like this is BS, what are you doing here. He'll listen and he'll take that feedback. Just once we leave the room it can't be that way

anymore. So I would say that's the only way he really... That's the main expectation he has. That we have discussions but then understand that when a decision has to be made, it has to be made.

Principal 2:

Sometimes he'll make the right decision and sometimes not and that's okay. That's part of leadership too, is that there's decisions that have to be made in a certain time and we do the best we can.

REFERENCES

- Adler, P. S., & Borys, B. (1996). Two types of bureaucracy: Enabling and coercive. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 61-89.
- Anthony, D. W. (2016). *An analysis of principal attrition in a large urban school district*. University of Maryland, College Park.
- Bartoletti, J., & Connelly, G. (2013). Leadership matters: What the research says about the importance of principal leadership. *National Association of Elementary School Principals*, 16, 1-21.
- Bennett, J. T., & Johnson, M. H. (1979). Paperwork and bureaucracy. *Economic Inquiry*, 17(3), 435-451.
- Béteille, T., Kalogrides, D., & Loeb, S. (2012). Stepping stones: Principal career paths and school outcomes. *Social Science Research*, 41(4), 904-919.
- Bottoms, G., & Fry, B. (2009). *The District Leadership Challenge: Empowering Principals to Improve Teaching and Learning*.
- Bottoms, G., & Schmidt-Davis, J. (2010). *The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support, and Principal Leadership*.
- Branch, G. F., Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G. (2012). *Estimating the effect of leaders on public sector productivity: The case of school principals*.
- Briggs, A. R., Morrison, M., & Coleman, M. (2012). *Research methods in educational leadership and management*: Sage Publications.
- Bteille, T., Kalogrides, D., & Loeb, S. (2012). Stepping stones: Principal career paths and school outcomes. *Social Science Research*, 41(4), 904-919.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2012.03.003>

- Burress, K. C. (2017). *Why Principals Leave? Why Principals Stay?* (10264129 Ed.D.), The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.
- Chang, Y., Leach, N., & Anderman, E. M. (2015). The role of perceived autonomy support in principals' affective organizational commitment and job satisfaction. *Social Psychology of Education, 18*(2), 315-336.
- Chingos, M. M., Whitehurst, G. J., & Lindquist, K. M. (2014). School superintendents: Vital or irrelevant. *Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings*.
- Clifford, M. (2010). *Hiring Quality School Leaders: Challenges and Emerging Practices*. Learning Point Associates.
- Cooper, H. (2015). *Research synthesis and meta-analysis: A step-by-step approach* (Vol. 2): Sage publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*: Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*: Sage Publications.
- Daly, A. J., Der-Martirosian, C., Ong-Dean, C., Park, V., & Wishard-Guerra, A. (2011). Leading under sanction: Principals' perceptions of threat rigidity, efficacy, and leadership in underperforming schools. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 10*(2), 171-206.
- Domina, T., Pharris-Ciurej, N., Penner, A. M., Penner, E. K., Brummet, Q., Porter, S. R., & Sanabria, T. (2018). Is free and reduced-price lunch a valid measure of educational disadvantage? *Educational Researcher, 47*(9), 539-555.

- Evans, D. E. (2010). *Understanding why principals leave or stay in challenging urban schools*. (3413360 Ed.D.), University of California, Berkeley.
- Farley-Ripple, E. N., Raffel, J. A., & Welch, J. C. (2012). Administrator career paths and decision processes. *Journal of Educational Administration*.
- Farley, C. (2019). Better Evidence for Better Schools: Insights from the First 10 Years of the Research Alliance for New York City Schools. *Research Alliance for New York City Schools*.
- Fowler Jr, F. J. (2013). *Survey research methods*: Sage publications.
- Fry, B., Bottoms, G., O'Neill, K., & Walker, S. (2007). *Schools Need Good Leaders Now: State Progress in Creating a Learning-Centered School Leadership System. Challenge to Lead Series*.
- Fullan, M. (2018). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact*: John Wiley & Sons.
- Göksoy, S. (2015). Bureaucratic Problems at Schools. *Journal of Education and Future*(7), 99-118.
- Goldring, R., & Taie, S. (2014). Principal Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2012-13 Principal Follow-Up Survey. First Look. NCES 2014-064 (pp. 62): National Center for Education Statistics. , P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398.
- Hanson, W. E., Creswell, J. W., Clark, V. L. P., Petska, K. S., & Creswell, J. D. (2005). Mixed methods research designs in counseling psychology. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 52(2), 224-235. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.224>
- Harvey, J., & Holland, H. (2011). The school principal as leader: Guiding schools to better teaching and learning. *The wallace foundation*.

- HHS.gov. (2017). Informed Consent FAQs. Retrieved from <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/guidance/faq/informed-consent/index.html>
- Hirsch, E., Freitas, C., Church, K., & Villar, A. (2008). Massachusetts Teaching, Learning and Leading Survey: Creating school conditions where teachers stay and students thrive. Retrieved from Mass TeT T S website: www.masstells.org/sites/default/files/attachments/finalreport.pdf.
- Hoy, W., & Miskel, C. (2008). Theory, research and practice in educational administration. Translated to Persian by: Abaszadeh S. Urmia: Urmia University pub, 2008, 88-46.
- Hoy, W. K. (2003b). Enabling school structure form. Retrieved from <http://www.waynehoy.com/pdfs/form-ess.pdf>
- Hoy, W. K., & Kupersmith, W. (1984). Principal Authenticity and Faculty Trust: Key Elements in Organizational Behavior. *Planning and Changing*, 15(2), 80-88.
- Hoy, W. K., & Sweetland, S. R. (2000). School Bureaucracies That Work: Enabling, Not Coercive. *Journal of School Leadership*, 10(6), 525-541.
- Hoy, W. K., & Sweetland, S. R. (2001). Designing better schools: The meaning and measure of enabling school structures. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 37(3), 296-321.
- Ikemoto, G., Gates, S., & Hamilton, L. (2009). *District and school conditions associated with successful leadership in urban school districts*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the University Council of Education Administration, Anaheim, CA.

- Ikemoto, G., Taliaferro, L., Fenton, B., & Davis, J. (2014). Great Principals at Scale: Creating District Conditions That Enable All Principals to Be Effective. *New Leaders*.
- Jacob, J. A. (2004). *A study of school climate and enabling bureaucracy in select New York City public elementary schools*. (3166881 Ed.D.), St. John's University (New York), School of Education and Human Services.
- Jerald, C. (2012). Leading for effective teaching: How school systems can support principal success. *Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*.
- Kena, G., Musu-Gillette, L., Robinson, J., Wang, X., Rathbun, A., Zhang, J., . . . Velez, E. D. V. (2015). The Condition of Education 2015. NCES 2015-144. *National Center for Education Statistics*.
- Kotnis, B. (2004). *Enabling bureaucracies in education: A case study of formalization in an urban district and schools*. (3141293 Ph.D.), State University of New York at Buffalo.
- Ladd, H. F. (2011). Teachers' perceptions of their working conditions: How predictive of planned and actual teacher movement? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 33(2), 235-261.
- Lalor, J. G., Casey, D., Elliott, N., Coyne, I., Comiskey, C., Higgins, A., . . . Begley, C. (2013). Using case study within a sequential explanatory design to evaluate the impact of specialist and advanced practice roles on clinical outcomes: the SCAPE study. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 13(1), 55.

- Landy, K. E. (2013). *Enabling district structure: The relationship between perceived district structure and principal self-efficacy*. (3558426 Ed.D.), Fordham University.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (vol. 75): Sage Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from "Case Study Research in Education."*: ERIC.
- Miller, A. L. (2012). Investigating Social Desirability Bias in Student Self-Report Surveys. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 36(1), 30-47.
- Mitgang, L. (2013). *"Districts Matter": Cultivating the Principals Urban Schools Need. Perspective*.
- Muijs, D., Harris, A., Lumby, J., Morrison, M., & Sood, K. (2006). Leadership and leadership development in highly effective further education providers. Is there a relationship? *Journal of further and higher education*, 30(1), 87-106.
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*: Sage.
- Sanders, M. G. (2001). The role of "community" in comprehensive school, family, and community partnership programs. *The Elementary School Journal*, 102(1), 19-34.
- Scott, W. R., & Davis, G. F. (2015). *Organizations and organizing: Rational, natural and open systems perspectives*: Routledge.
- Sebastian, J., & Allensworth, E. (2012). The Influence of Principal Leadership on Classroom Instruction and Student Learning: A Study of Mediated Pathways to Learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 626-663.

- Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (5th ed.): Teachers college press.
- Sinden, J. E. (2002). *Enabling bureaucratic behaviors and structures in schools*. (3059322 Ph.D.), The Ohio State University.
- Sinden, J. E., Hoy, W. K., & Sweetland, S. R. (2004). An analysis of enabling school structure: Theoretical, empirical, and research considerations. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 42(4/5), 462-478.
- Snodgrass Rangel, V. (2018). A Review of the Literature on Principal Turnover. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(1), 87-124. doi:10.3102/0034654317743197
- St. John's University. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.stjohns.edu/about/history-and-facts/our-mission>
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*: sage.
- Stewart, A. L., Thrasher, A. D., Goldberg, J., & Shea, J. A. (2012). A framework for understanding modifications to measures for diverse populations. *Journal of aging and health*, 24(6), 992-1017.
- Subedi, D. (2016). Explanatory Sequential Mixed Method Design as the Third Research Community of Knowledge Claim. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 4, 570-577. doi:10.12691/education-4-7-10
- Taie, S., & Goldring, R. (2017). Characteristics of Public Elementary and Secondary School Teachers in the United States: Results from the 2015-16 National Teacher and Principal Survey. First Look. NCES 2017-072. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

- Tekleselassie, A. A., & Villarreal III, P. (2011). Career mobility and departure intentions among school principals in the United States: Incentives and disincentives. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 10*(3), 251-293.
- Wahlstrom, K. L., Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning. The Informed Educator Series.*
- Watts, D. M. (2009). *Enabling school structure, mindfulness, and teacher empowerment: Test of a theory.* (3390602 Ed.D.), The University of Alabama.
- Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization: being part 1 of Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft:* William Hodge and Company, Ltd.
- Whitehead, B. M., Boschee, F., & Decker, R. H. (2012). *The principal: Leadership for a global society:* Sage Publications.
- Whitehurst, G. J., Chingos, M. M., & Gallaher, M. R. (2013). Do School Districts Matter?. *Brookings Institution.*
- Wolcott, H. F. (1999). *Ethnography: A way of seeing.* Rowman Altamira.
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods:* Sage publications.
- Ylimaki, R. M. (2014). *The new instructional leadership:* New York: Routledge and University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA).
- Zepeda, S. J., & Ponticell, J. A. (2018). *The Wiley handbook of educational supervision:* John Wiley & Sons.

VITA

Name	<i>Matthew Darby</i>
Date Graduated	<i>June 2003</i>
Baccalaureate Degree	<i>Bachelor of Science, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York Major: Industrial and Labor Relations</i>
Date Graduated	<i>May 2007</i>
Other Degrees and Certificates	<i>Master of Science in Teaching, Pace University, New York, New York Major: Students with Disabilities Childhood Education</i>
Date Graduated	<i>August 2013</i>
	<i>Advanced Graduate Certificate, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, New York Major: Educational Leadership</i>
Date Graduated	<i>June 2016</i>