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Understanding Why Principals Leave or Stay in Challenging Urban Schools

by

Donald Eugene Evans

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Joint Doctor of Education  
with California State University

in

Education Leadership

in

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Cynthia Coburn, Chair  
Professor Sandra Hollingsworth  
Professor Charles Henry

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@ 2010

Donald Eugene Evans

## Abstract

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University of California, Berkeley

Professor Cynthia Coburn, Chair

There is growing concern with principal turnover in urban schools. School districts are struggling to find qualified and effective principals to lead schools. With accountability on the rise and increasing demands, the job has become more challenging than in previous years. Using a case study format, this study focuses on six principals, 3 principals that have left the position and 3 principals currently in their position at the elementary level at different challenging schools in the Bay Area of California. Through interviews, this study focuses on the micropolitics of school organization and management relations and how those dynamics influence principals' decision to stay or leave the job.

The findings in this study indicate that there are three sources of micropolitical stress for leaving and staying principals: 1) mandated programs; 2) staffing issues, including hiring, firing, racial, and power plays by teachers; undermining principal authority; and 3) relationships with the district.

The most difficult relationship to manage for leaving principals was the district. Due to a lack of support by the district, leaving principals felt isolated disempowered and disenfranchised. This led to a loss of a sense of self-efficacy. In contrast to leaving principals, staying principals had supportive collaborative relationship with central office. They were able to better navigate micropolitical tension at school sites. Their senses of self-efficacy (or competence at their jobs) resulted from the relative success of overcoming those challenges.

## Dedication

To all the principals struggling to make a difference in challenging urban schools.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, principal vacancies have become increasingly difficult to fill in many urban schools districts in the United States of America. Educators, politicians and community leaders across the country are alarmed at the number of vacancies existing in schools. In fact, a report from the National Association of Elementary Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) found widespread shortages of qualified candidates available for principal positions across America at every school level (Education Research Service, 1998). Similar results were confirmed within the state of California through the Association of California Administrators (2001). Yet while the education community grapples with these leadership shortages, researchers agree that school improvement efforts are impacted by continual principal turnover (Macmillan, 2000).

Policy makers and the education research community agree that the key to successful reform and improved student achievement is the preparation and hiring of principals (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2004 a,b; Waters and Grubb, 2004). Often with little preparation, principals become responsible and accountable for many reforms and initiatives (Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2009). They are expected to move beyond the traditional role of school operations manager to reform agents and instructional leaders able to create and manage innovation, improve organizational performance, and interpret data to develop strategic goals (Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2009). Yet despite the emerging responsibilities in the age of high stakes accountability, principals have not received the necessary resources, preparation, or mentoring that would expand their capacity to respond to these increased demands (Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2009).

Working in environments with little resources, principals exert their authority in varied and complex ways (Cuban, 2004). These challenges come into play in understanding the challenges of urban schools. To function as effective urban leaders, principals must be a “jack of all trades.” They must be instructional leaders that cultivate learning environments that support and facilitate strong instruction for the school community. In addition, a principal in this era must be part social worker, nurse, counselor, fundraiser, special education expert, security officer, internet expert along with being instructional leader and school manager (Ferrandino, 2000).

Clearly the role of principal has changed and expanded. Described as the loneliest job in town, the desire to lead and stay in a leadership position is not a position of choice; instead, it has become a position of challenge (Zellner, 2002). In a recent job satisfaction survey, the number one item most frequently reported by school administrators was “...feeling a sense of worth and accomplishment as a school administrator.” (Zellner, unpublished article). Principals felt more attention was given to their mistakes than their accomplishments. It is these reports that are disturbing to the education community.

Under the scrutiny of parents, communities, and politicians, school boards face an uphill battle to restore confidence in failing schools. Solid school leadership is critical for schools to succeed, yet is missing in many failing schools (Brady, 2003). With accountability on the rise, principals are responsible for the achievement of students, district reforms and mandates, policies and procedures at schools. Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) schools must consistently improve academic performance each year. Now, more than ever, the need to retain strong principals to lead urban schools is critical.

This study focuses on 6 principals, 3 who have decided to stay with their schools and 3 who are leaving, all of whom work in challenging schools in the Bay Area of California. The

combination of demands and accountability require leadership to pay close attention to the invested interest of stakeholders at school sites. I use micropolitical theory to understand the daily acts of managing power and politics of diverse stakeholders such as parents, teachers and the district. How well principals managed to negotiate those relations determined where they stayed or left schools.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In spite of the fact that it is a well-recognized problem, there is surprisingly little empirical research on why urban principals leave challenging schools. However, research does find the principal shortage to be alarming and worthy of attention to school districts across the country. This research suggests that urban principals are faced with inexperienced teachers, crowded classrooms, insufficient textbooks, safety, low expectations, and lack of resources to meet the needs of many at-risk students (Cuban, 2004; Kimball and Sirotnik, 2000). Operating under these economic, political, and social conditions in urban environments causes principals' professional practices to be different from nonurban schools (Portin, 2000; Cistone and Stevenson, 2000). However, there are insufficient data to prove these conditions are reasons for principal leaving or staying in urban schools. Also, many researchers that study the problem do not do it theoretically, so we get a list of factors that explain shortages, but little explanation about how these factors work together to help us understand the decision for principals to leave the job. In this chapter I will review the literature on principal shortages, the challenges of urban principals and the strategies for sustaining principal leadership. Also, I will provide a conceptual framework to understanding why principals leave or stay in challenging schools.

### *Principal Shortages*

The results of a number of studies over the past several years make it clear that qualified professionals are not seeking the position of school principal. Principal shortages can be found across the country in suburban, rural and urban areas (ERS, 1998). District superintendents struggle to find qualified candidates to fill vacancies each year. Regardless of the schools' grade levels and whether they were rural, suburban or urban schools, the position has become increasingly difficult to fill. Several studies conducted throughout the country confirmed these shortages. Association of California Administrators (ACSA) surveyed three hundred and seventy six superintendents in the state of California to find that ninety percent reported a shortage of candidates in the principal pool (Association of California School Administrators, 1999). In an Indiana survey, 73 percent of superintendents described the pool of qualified candidates dwindling from the previous year (Indiana Association of School Principals & Ball State, 1999). The Maryland state department of education expected over 600 vacancies in the summer of 2002 or 45 percent of the state's principals, during the 2003-2004 hiring season. In a survey in Massachusetts in 1999, 33 percent of the principals surveyed indicated that they expect to retire in less than five years (Massachusetts Elementary School Principals' Association Inc., 2001). Of the responding principals in a New York State survey in October, 2001, 48 percent of principals stated they planned to retire by 2006. (School Administration Association of New York State, 2001).

While research shows shortages throughout K-12 education, several studies have found principal shortages most intense at the secondary level (Whitaker, 2005). 50 percent of superintendents surveyed indicated the shortage of principal candidates was somewhat extreme or extreme and deserved attention. Not only were the applicants for principal positions decreasing, there was an issue of the quality of candidates for superintendents. Teacher candidates interested in the position were discouraged by the environment of urban principalship and were less likely to aspire to the position (Cistone & Stevenson, 2000).

In summary, there is consensus that there is a shortage of principals for available positions at all levels, especially at high schools. Results of the number of studies over the past several years

make it clear that qualified professionals are not seeking the position of school principal. Where will school districts go to find them? Education researchers and district leaders believe more school districts will be unable to find qualified leaders in schools across the country (Educational Research Service, 1998; Ferrandino and Tirozzi, 2000). The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that there will be a 13 percent increase in job openings for education administrators between 2000-2010. These findings are alarming and worthy of attention. The critical question posed to the education community is, why aren't there enough candidates for these vacancies? What factors contribute to the lack of interest of qualified candidates?

### ***Challenges of Urban Schools***

While the above literature was mainly concerned with the supply of credentialed principals, this section focuses on the challenges of being a principal in an urban setting and the factors that contribute to the lack of interest of qualified candidates. There is a large body of scholarship on the challenges of being a principal in urban schools. Scholars highlight several aspects of the position that makes school leadership in urban districts especially difficult. Kimball and Sirotnick (2000) argue that changing demographics create the societal conditions plaguing urban schools as a nightmare for principals. The authors argue that the conditions of schools have become nearly impossible and the principal's position has less to do with supply of principals but more the demands of the job. Interviews conducted with two successful principals in very challenging urban elementary schools revealed poverty, high minority populations, high mobility rates, large numbers of free and reduced lunch, limited resources, homelessness, single parent households, and new immigrants as contributing factors for the job being difficult and challenging. Although these problems are found in many schools, urban school districts face some of the most severe issues and problems (Cooley & Shen, 2000).

The backdrop of poor academic achievement, violence, drugs, low parental involvement, inadequate funding, increased accountability, and politically charged environments contribute to the conditions of urban school leadership (Cooley & Shen, 2000). Researchers found significant changes in the ethnic and socioeconomic composition the student body, shifting federal program priorities, adoption of state curriculum standards, and the site based decision making and families struggling to meet challenges have contributed to the changing principalship and its impact on the job (Portin, Shen, & Williams, 98).

While researchers agree that urban leaders face enormous challenges, many principals prefer less demanding schools as populated by higher income students, higher achieving students, and fewer minority students (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009). Researchers found that experienced principals tend to gravitate towards schools that are easier to run—serving higher income populations, more white students, and higher achieving students. This suggests that schools serving more disadvantaged populations tend to have less experienced principals--generally a negative factor for achievement (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009).

These studies paint a compelling picture of the societal ills that plague urban schools. In spite of poverty, homelessness, high mobility, single family households, new immigrants and limited resources, urban principals are expected to raise student achievement every year. While these studies provide a convincing environmental backdrop, they do not address how principals manage schools in this arena. If working conditions are unappealing and unattractive as researchers describe in these studies, why do some principals' stay and others leave under the

same conditions? Also, if the issue is not about supply and more about the demands then what are the additional demands of the job that makes the job more challenging?

### ***Demands of the Job***

There is a small body of literature on the demands of urban principals. However, research studies have attributed principal recruitment and retention to the demands of the job. Researchers looked at principal shortages in two ways. First, they looked at difficult working conditions as a prime factor in creating the challenge. For example, aspiring leaders cited demands of the job, dealing with difficult parents, lack of resources; high stakes testing; long hours; increased responsibilities; and little time for family life (Hammond, Muffs, and Sciascia, 2001). Second, qualified women and people of color had not been taken seriously for the job. Researchers argue that three times more males were selected for principalship than females (Hammond, Muffs, and Sciascia, 2001).

Studies show that working long hours on the job, evening activities, unreachable expectations, extensive paperwork required by state and district mandates, and social problems were contributing factors to the overwhelming stress principals feel on the job (Yerkes and Guaglianone, 1998; Hertling, 2001; Cooley and Shen, 2000). Education Research (1998) confirmed these findings and included that the job was too stressful, plagued with societal problems (poverty, lack of family support, etc.), instructional challenges, state and district mandates. Balancing personal and professional responsibilities, the amount of work involved and a perceived ethnic and gender biases in the hiring process were major issues impacting principal shortages (Hammond, Muffs, and Sciascia, 2001).

These results were very similar to assistant principals aspiring to be secondary principals. Aspiring principals indicated a desire to make a difference but balancing the demands of the job and family, terminating unfit employees; job stress; pressure from interest groups; the extended work day required; extracurricular supervision; and teacher grievances along with union complaints were characteristics that made the job unappealing and therefore reasons for less desirable at the secondary level (Pounder & Merrill, 2001).

In a study conducted by Consortium on Chicago Research revealed that the top five roadblocks on the job are: (1) pressure to get test scores up, (2) social problems in the school's community, (3) difficulty removing ineffective teachers, (4) apathetic or irresponsible parents, and (5) problem students (Stoelinga and Consortium on Chicago School, 2008).

While the demands are high for urban leadership and the applicant pool low, researchers link the shortages of principals to the increasing demands of the job. Also, qualified women and people of color have not been considered in the applicant pool. Though these studies show that the job is stressful, it does not provide solid evidence that these demands are reasons for principals leaving or staying on the job. These studies do not provide information on what happens when all these forces come together? How does this impact the way leaders behave under these conditions? The above studies do not address these issues.

### ***Site and District Challenges in Urban Schools***

While the above literature addresses the demands of the job, I turn my attention to factors contributing to principal retention to understand why principals stay or leave challenging urban schools. There are only a few studies that link the conditions in which principal work to reasons they leave. However, the research is sparse. These studies point to two general categories or reasons that principals stay or leave: site and district challenges. I begin by reviewing site and

district challenges. Considering the many challenges of urban school principals, compensation, accountability, and decision-making for the job can be linked to whether or not a candidate leaves the position.

Educational Research Service (1998) found that sixty percent of superintendents surveyed across the country revealed insufficient compensation with respect to job responsibilities as one of the reasons principals leave, thirty-two percent found the job too stressful, and twenty-seven percent stated that to do the job required too much time as the top three factors that discouraged potential candidates. Norton (2002) links salary compensation as an attraction for keeping principals on the job. When considering the extra daily hours, longer year and added responsibilities, the increase in pay is relatively small when a teacher is promoted to a principal. The pay is minimal between top teacher and administrator Hertling (2001).

Though studies do not state salary as the main reason for principals leaving the job, they do link them to principal turnover. However, research does not provide evidence that compensating principals differently will encourage them stay on the job (Norton, 2002). Although Norton acknowledges salary as a major factor, he does not provide evidence that increasing salaries will attract potential candidates. However, Norton does provide alternatives to salary increases by outsourcing work responsibilities of principals. This suggests that the pay is important to principals when taking into account the increased amount of responsibility placed upon them.

While these studies accurately depict the challenges urban school principals face in their jobs, they do not link these challenges to principal retention. These studies suggest the role of principal in urban schools is tough and the challenges are great for urban leaders. However, these jobs are tough everywhere and yet not everyone leaves his/her position. What we don't know is why some principals stay and others leave.

Several studies have linked accountability as one of the many factors that impacted principal retention. With new reform laws, such as *No Child Left Behind*, an enormous amount of responsibility and accountability has been placed on leaders of schools. Peterson and Young (2004) found that the *No Child Left Behind* legislation influences decisions superintendents make when gathering data results on student achievement at schools. When test score results are reported in newspapers, principals are in the direct line of fire. This experience can lead principals to leave their jobs and prevent new applicants for applying (Johnson, 2005; Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001). For example, Johnson (2005) finds that principals point to high levels of accountability as one reason principals leave their jobs. In a study to find why principals voluntarily quit their positions, Johnson found that principals fell into two categories; satisfied exiters and unsatisfied exiters. Satisfied exiters had no intentions of leaving but left due to new opportunities outside the profession while the unsatisfied exiters were hoping to leave and sought alternatives to the principalship. Of the nine exiters, four found the job to be different than anticipated; three found the managerial responsibilities burdensome and prevented them from being instructional leaders while the remaining two left for health reasons. When asked principals about what they didn't miss about the job, they revealed accountability and pressure coming from central office, parents and teachers. These additional pressures related to accountability also lead potential candidates to hesitate to apply for the job of school principal (Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001).

In contrast to Johnson (2005), Matthews examined principals that left the job involuntarily. In the state of Tennessee, superintendents and district supervisors were asked to rate the impact of 23 competencies on principal's job performance on a scale of 1 to 3 (low to high impact). The resulting mean scores ranged from highs of 2.39 for failure to work cooperatively with faculty

and staff and 2.37 for not making sound decisions to a low of 1.59 for poor management of school budget facilities, and operations (Matthews, 2002).

Feeling the pressures of the job can lead to job dissatisfaction. Rayfield (2002) concluded that many duties assigned to the principal were not identified as positive factors in job satisfaction. Rayfield identified twenty-five items that are associated with the responsibilities and tasks of secondary administrators. These included teacher selection, evaluation of instructional staff, assignment of faculty to courses, leading professional development, development of master calendar, working to develop a cooperative relationship, enforcement of contract provisions, making the school safe, dealing with disruptive students, dealing with attendance concerns, and working with parents relative to student as some of examples of tasks. Though practicing administrators generated the list, it did not specify what tasks were more satisfying or dissatisfying to perform.

Though studies do not show a direct correlation between job satisfaction and principal turnover, it does provide evidence that task assignments, pay, and security play a role in a principal's decision to stay or leave the job. Therefore, school districts must be concerned with tasks and responsibilities that are overwhelming to perform and provide support and resources to make the job manageable and satisfying in efforts to retain good leadership.

Several studies highlight the importance of principals having the autonomy to make key decisions at their site, particularly on staffing issues. The roles of urban principals are different in suburban and rural schools (Portin, 2000). They are unique in the way decisions are made at the site level and the way principals perceive and interact with partnerships at their school is different from suburban schools. Eighty-three percent of urban principals were either undecided or disagreed with the statement that the parameters of decision-making authority was clearly established for principals as opposed to seventy percent suburban schools. Portin asserts that changes with decentralization and increased responsibilities placed upon school sites by districts have resulted in role ambiguity for urban site administrators. This ambiguity of decision-making can be a reason for frustration when lines of communication are not clear for principals. Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna (1986) found similar results and describe the authority principals need and the authority they have as the "autonomy gap." (Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna, 2006). The difference between the amount of authority that districts school principals think they need in order to be effective leaders and the amount they actually have is greatest with regard to personnel decisions (i.e., the ability to discharge or transfer unsuitable teachers hire teachers and staff, and determine the number and type of faculty and staff positions (Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna, 2006). Having the autonomy to manage roadblocks was important in being successful in urban schools (Weinles, 2001).

It can be implied through these studies that decision-making makes a difference in the success of principals. However, it is not clear from these studies that when the lines of communication are not clear, and that authority they have is limited, principals leave their positions.

The above studies provide evidence that there are many challenges confronting urban leaders. Studies show that the demands of the job, accountability, compensation, and decision-making are contributing factors to principal retention. However, these studies do not address what happens to urban leaders when all these forces come together while raising student achievement and being responsive to stakeholders in schools. This is of great concern because it will lead to why principal leave or stay in challenging schools. Research in this area will help provide insight to the types of professional development and programs that school districts need to recruit and retain urban leadership.

### ***Strategies for Sustaining Principal Leadership***

While the previous section focused on the challenges of urban school principals, I turn my attention to a small body of literature on principal retention. Though school districts and education schools provide various professional development programs and training for its administrators, few studies can be found on any one specific program that fully guarantees retention for urban principals. As mentioned earlier, the role of urban principal has changed to meet the demands of today's students. Reexamining the role and responsibilities of principals is within the scope of school districts. Winter, Rinehart, & Munoz (2002) surveyed one hundred and ninety individuals to find the number one recommended change in the principal's job was assigning some of the administrative duties to other personnel. Pounder and Merrill (2001) argue that redesigning the principal's job to minimize the heavy time demands will attract qualified candidates. Distributing and sharing responsibilities will relieve the stress principals feel with the increasing accountability and regulatory control imposed by districts and communities.

Researchers argue that leadership should not rest in the hands of one but shared and embodied by everyone (Hargreaves and Fink, 2003). Schools should think about continuity by planning successors as a way sustaining leadership. Creating the optimum conditions for succession should be the focus of school districts (Fullan, 2002). Though these studies provide professional ideas for principal retention, few of these recommendations have empirical evidence to support them.

To support principals working in urban schools, Beaumont (1997) finds leadership triads as a way to link principals to central office and the superintendent. "The Leadership Triad" model is a one-semester course that helps principals understand the uniqueness of urban schools and the factors that have an impact on school leadership. The course provides a set of skills that help principals navigate the political environment through understanding of oneself while incorporating strategies for reflective practices.

A mentoring network of principals along with a continuous professional development is needed for sustaining quality effective principals (Zellner & et, 2002). Researchers revealed that those identified to future leaders of schools need opportunities to engage in leadership activities that include planning, developing, directing, and implementing school programs and educational change that will make a positive difference in the campus community. Assistant principals need to engage in more responsibilities beyond discipline and other administrative tasks. The majority of administrators in the study agreed that the primary reasons for unsuccessful campus leadership include the principal's: (1) lack of ability to disseminate leadership throughout the campus; (2) inexperience in problem solving; (3) lack of reflection on leadership practice; (4) lack of experience in keeping the campus vision as a target; (5) lack of experience in self initiated leadership activities; and (6) lack of opportunity to be mentored and supported during initial stages of development as a leaders (Zellner & et, 2002).

While researchers find innovative ways of sustaining leadership, the quest for programs that will meet the needs of principals in urban schools remains a hot topic for school districts. The challenges are great and principal training is critical for sustaining qualified and effective leadership in urban areas.

While research informs us that urban schools are tough and challenging, it does not provide enough evidence to why some principals stay or leave. We can only speculate that the



culmination of growing responsibilities, tasks, compensation, and accountability lead some principals to become dissatisfied with the job and ultimately leave.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Most of the research on principal turnover is not guided by theoretical tools for understanding the problem. The few exceptions are listed below. In this study, I draw on micropolitical theory as a conceptual lens to understand why principals leave challenging schools. This theoretical lens allows me to explore the daily interpersonal relationships between principal-teacher, principal and district, and principal and parents as principals achieve their personal and professional goals at school sites. Micropolitical theory allows us to delve into the social interaction of individuals and the group. It seeks to capture individual differences, diversity, conflict, uses of informal power, and the negotiated and interpretive nature of organizations (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1987, 1991; Hall & Spencer-Hall, 1982). It is the day-to-day political activity at the school site that is the common theme of micropolitics (Everhart, 1991).

The term “Micropolitics” was first used by Laurence Iannacone (1975) to describe the politics of education at a research conference. This term was used in reference to the political and social activity between teachers, administrators, and students at school sites. It is described as competing strategies of control, lack of agreement in the area of achieving goals, the manner in which schools operate, and the existing conflict over resources and the results (Ball, 1987). Teachers and leaders deploy these strategies internally as they pursue their interests in the context of the management of the school (Hoyle, 1999).

The politics of education in the micro or school level of course must historically be situated in the larger or macro societal and political turbulence of the 60’s, to increased funded federal programs during the late 1960’s and early 70’s, the shift from liberal to neo-conservative values, and in the 1980’s, the shift of goals from equality to excellence in education, giving more power to states (Layton, 1989). During this period, politics of education focused on macropolitical issues (or external) such as intergovernmental conflicts and social demands impinging on and emanating from the government and local school districts (Marshall & Scribner, 1991).

The two broad perspective on the politics of education—macropolitics and micropolitics (internal)—are grounded in similar concepts such as power, influence, control, conflict/cooperation, strategies, exchange, negotiation, interest groups, values and ideologies (Ball, 1987; Barrott & Galvin, 1998; Blase, 1991c; Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Spring, 1997, 1998; Wirt & Kirst 1992). Macropolitics has generally been referred to the school’s external relationships and environments at the state and national levels (Willower, 1991) and the interactions of public and private organizations within, between, and among levels (Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Spring, 1997, 1998; Wirt & Kirst, 1992). Examples at the national level are Department of Education, Supreme Court, and Congress; state level examples are state legislature, governor, and state boards of education. At the local level examples are school boards, school superintendents, and private organizations (Spring, 1997, 1998; Wirt & Kirst, 1992).

Most researchers recognize the importance of external (macro) factors and their influence on schools in general and on its internal political processes and structures (e.g. Bacharack & Mundell, 1995; Ball, 1987; Barrott & Galvin, 1998; Blase, 1991c; Blase & Anderson 1995; Iannacone, 1975). However, there is a growing consensus that internal political dynamics, or micropolitics, are important as well (Blase & Blase, 2002).

Once concerned with macropolitical issues, a few researchers have now started examining the political life at schools. In the era of high stakes testing, site-based decision-making and increased parental involvement, a closer attention has been turned to the classroom and to the politics in and around schools (Marshall & Scribner, 1991).

Several studies can be found on the political strategies principals and teachers use to advance professional and personal goals at schools. For example, Mayrowetz and Price (2005) use micropolitical theory to illustrate how principals negotiate conflicting demand of teachers, parents in a gentrified urban setting. Three relationships were examined: parent and teacher, principal and community, and principal and teacher. Illustrating how a principal wrestles with power struggles inside and outside the school, the researchers highlight a school in turmoil over student discipline. Due to a lack of communication over discipline between a teacher and a student, a teacher is found seeking advice of colleagues and support of the teacher's union to attain her goal against the principal while a parent solicits support from the community against the teacher because of how discipline was administered by the teacher at the school. In an effort to address student discipline, the community advocates an African American curriculum to help teachers understand children of color and reduce the number of discipline issues. Though the principal knows the curriculum will not be popular with teachers, a remedy is needed to address student discipline. As a result, tension and conflict is created due to different goals at the school. This case study provides one example of how the micropolitical is useful illuminating interpersonal relationships at a school site. Though the study does not address relationships between principals and other school officials, we might expect to see similar interactions.

Teacher resistance to change is another manifestation of conflicting interests in school and, as such, is a common micropolitical activity (Bishop & Mulford, 1999). Bishop and Mulford conducted a case study of four schools in Victoria, Australia to explore strategies of resistance to an externally imposed curriculum from the State Government. Researchers found that micropolitics emerged when a highly respected principal in the community was given an edict to require all teachers at the school to implement a new government curriculum. The Minister of Education wanted a unifying curriculum for Victorian all schools. This meant that principals were required to ensure full implementation of curriculum at schools and classrooms. Many teachers felt the change in curriculum was unnecessary and became cynical. Teachers felt the principal they had trusted and respected was coopted by head officials. Despite the new demands on her own and teachers required to implementing central and school-based initiatives, the principal believed it was important to stay positive and focused on school achievement. Nevertheless, the principal was well aware of teachers' negative perception of the initiative.

The edict for all teachers to change their curriculum had a divisive effect on and amongst teachers, and particularly, the teachers that had respected and trusted their principal. After one year of introducing the new initiative, only a handful of teachers implemented the curriculum. At staff meetings, some teachers openly criticized the program. The principal used professional development days for training to encourage teachers as well as provided additional time for teachers to collaborate. While some teachers remained positive, others viewed the edict as if it was a non-negotiable initiative. Some teachers felt the principal did not act on their behalf and therefore were suspicious of her intentions.

There is a discrepancy between the projected, official and public view of the initiative and the private view of those at the school level (Bishop & Mulford, 1999). In other words, micropolitical processes and structures in schools intensified as a result of macropolitical or external changes. Teachers' perception of principal cooption in implementing a key change,

which they did not support, qualified their trust of the principal, increased teacher alienation and heightened the use of resistance strategies. Teachers' reactions to imposed policies are heavily influenced by their judgment about appropriateness to school-based circumstances. Consistent with other recent research (Blase & Blase, 1997) this case study shows how this change sharpened issues related to the different ideologies and values of teachers and administrators, and increased the need to renegotiate boundaries and turf.

Hoyle (1986) identified six micropolitical strategies principal used at schools to advance their goals; dividing and ruling, co-opting, displacing, controlling information, and controlling meetings. Another strategy was identified by Crowson and Porter-Gehrie (1980) called discretionary behavior. These strategies are illustrated in a study by Cilos conducted with 30 principals in the state of Pennsylvania. Using Hoyle's six micropolitical strategies and Crowson and Porter-Gehrie's seventh strategy, Cilos found 80 percent of principals indicated that they used at least one identifiable micropolitical strategy. The prevalent strategy use was some form of exchange (63%). The need for it could arise from a personal need of the teacher for a building need of the administration. In these cases principals was either developing a cache of figurative chips for future brokering, or cashing them in to resolve a difficult situation. As a rule, both parties got what they wanted. 50 Percent of the principals employed divide and conquer. This was done when the situation was deemed too formidable to take on the entire faculty or even a department, such as program or policy change. Half of the principals surveyed relied on an informal network of key people. They used this informal organization for feedback or as a sounding board about a policy or a direction for the school. Co-optation or taking in your competition rather than isolating them was reported by 20 percent of the principals. In this situation, the issue at hand was to be resolved by a committee. The principal would include the most vociferous, obstreperous teacher with several moderates. Displacement, or disguising the real issue, (which was often personal and self-serving) with a legitimate, professional goal was used by 6 percent of the principals. They argued that this was in the best interest of students because of lagging test scores on standardized tests on maps and recommendations by experts in a field.

In a multifaceted reality school administration, there is the authority of the principal, the autonomy and collegiality of the teachers, relatively scarce resources between them. This combination of factors means that the administration of the school depends on power and influence; if there is power and influence, then there are micropolitics to get the job done (Cilo, 1994).

Like the teachers in the study of Mayrowetz and Price and Bishop & Mulford, principals are bound to become discouraged when they have to follow mandates from the district office rather than follow their own training and judgment. We don't know what the micropolitical factors are because the question of power never surfaces. No one acknowledges, for example, that power differences enable district offices to mandate actions and policies that principals must follow. Following the apolitical cultural norm, Districts suggest the mandate comes from research on "what works." It is time to turn over the rock and see how power relations under gird principals' decisions to stay or leave their urban schools.

### CHAPTER 3: STUDY DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS

To understand why principals leave challenging schools, I used a cross case study to inform my research. Case studies allow researchers to investigate real life experiences in their natural settings (Yin, 2004). Also, this design will allow me to answer the “how” and “why” questions in a comprehensive manner (Yin, 2004).

For this research study, I interviewed six principals focusing on their experiences at the elementary level in different but challenging urban settings in the Bay Area of California. Throughout the study, I paid close attention to the micropolitics of school organization and management relations and how those dynamics influence principals’ decision to stay or leave the job. Using micropolitical theory as a lens, I paid attention to principal-teacher relations, principal-community relations, and principal-district relations to gain insight to the challenges existing at school sites. Examining these challenges will provide a better understanding of if and relations of power play a role in principal retention.

#### *Defining Challenging Urban Schools*

The U.S. Census Bureau (2002) classifies as urban all territory, population, and housing units located within an urbanized area or an urban cluster. It delineates urban area and urban cluster boundaries to encompass densely settled territory, which consists of (a) core census block groups that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile, and (b) surrounding census blocks that have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile. The Census Bureau also defines the general concept of metropolitan area. This is an area with a large population nucleus, together with adjacent communities that have a high degree of economic and social interaction with that nucleus. It also may include one or more outlying counties that have close economic and social relationships with the central county.

Conceptualizing an urban area in this manner suggests a number of important characteristics that may help to define the nature of such places. The following is a list of characteristics that help to define the urban context.

- \* Population density
- \* Structural density
- \* High concentration of people of color
- \* High concentration of recent immigrants
- \* High rates of reported crimes
- \* Per capita higher rates of poverty
- \* Inequities in the educational system
- \* Inequities in access to health care.

Urban schools in large measure reflect the characteristics of the environment in which they are located. The status of urban public education has become a topic of much concern in recent years (Gallay & Flanagan, 2000; Kolodny, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2000; Olson & Jerald, 1998; Parker, Kelly, & Sanford, 1998). It is evident that public schools in urban areas face significant issues that are qualitatively different from those confronting schools in rural or suburban contexts.

For the purpose of this research project, I incorporated in the definition of challenging as schools that are low performing. NCLB (2001) defines low performing schools as a public

elementary school or secondary school that has failed to make annual yearly progress, as described in section 1111(b), for two or more consecutive years. High Priority Schools Grant defines low performing schools as decile 1 and 2 schools according to academic performance index. Therefore, challenging urban schools included:

- Located in a urban area rather than a rural, small town, or suburban area
- High rate of poverty (as measured by Free and Reduced Lunch data)
- High population of second language learners
- High mobility rate
- Program Improvement School (not meeting AYP for two or more years) or SAIT schools (decile 1 and 2 according to California State guidelines).

### Selection of Principals

I selected six elementary principals were identified for the study. First, I identified three principals who had left their positions in the previous five years and then identified three principals who remained in their position who were matched as close as possible through gender, years of experience as a principal, and school demographics to identify three other principals who remained in their positions. Matching similar characteristics helped me focus on key issues that cause some principals to leave and stay under the same conditions. All principals were employed at challenging urban schools in the Bay Area of California.

Table 1  
Data Collection

Group	Data Collection Activities
Principals Leaving the Job <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three Elementary Principals</li> <li>• Representative of Both Genders</li> <li>• At least Three Years of Experience</li> </ul>	1. Interview with principals 2. Follow-up interviews with themes from 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 3. Follow-up with additional questions regarding micropolitical themes.
Principals Remaining in Position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three Elementary Principals – strategically matched with leaving principals above</li> <li>• Representative of Both Genders</li> <li>• At least Three Years of Experience</li> </ul>	1. Interview principals 2. Follow-up interview with themes from 1 <sup>st</sup> interview 3. Follow-up interviews with additional questions regarding micropolitical themes.

I used snowball sampling to identify those principals who left their positions (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). That is: due the difficulty of finding participants for the research, I recruited principals that had left their position from among acquaintances. Next, I purposively sampled three principals that remained in challenging urban schools (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

### ***Interviews***

I gathered data to understand if and how power relations effected principals' decisions to stay or leave in urban schools. I conducted two-three interviews with each principal. The interviews were semi-structured. (See AppendixA for interview protocol.) I designed a series of questions to elicit specific answers on part of the respondents (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). In general, I

asked questions about age, gender, years of experience and type of schools to be used to compare and contrast respondents for the study. Also, I framed questions that investigated the micropolitical relationships at school sites. For example, respondents were asked to describe one positive and one negative experience with teachers.

During the first phase of semi-structured inter views, principals were asked to identify and discuss professional and personal factors that contributed to principal retention. I paid close attention to the interpersonal dynamics of principal-teacher relations, principal-parent relations, and principal-district relations. The second round of interviews with each data set explored what emerged from the first set of interviews. A third interview was conducted, if necessary to clarify any questions that emerged as a result of the second interview with all principals

#### Data Analysis

My strategies for data analysis came from the two data sets: principals who left their urban school positions and principals currently in their positions. First level of coding descriptively summarized portions of the data while more inferential pattern coding identified themes that speak to the influences that influence staying in or exiting urban schools.

Using micropolitical theory as the conceptual framework, codes were assigned to chunks of phrases or words that were connected principal-teacher, principal-parent, and principal-district relationships along with other information that emerged from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Table 2  
Interview Schedule

Source	Frequency	Purpose
Semi structured interviews	2-3 times	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To document challenges and obstacles in the position of administrators</li> <li>2. To document political themes that have cause tension and conflict on the job from principal-teacher relations, principal-district, and principal-parent/community relations</li> <li>3. To clarify questions regarding second interview that more exploration.</li> </ol>

A case dynamic matrix was created to visually present relationships between the findings themselves. Additionally, the matrix served that allowed me to make comparisons and draw conclusions based on themes that emerged from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This type of analysis helped me to move from empirical to more a conceptual understanding of why principals leave or remain in challenging schools (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

### ***Introducing the Principals***

The six principals identified in this study are from schools in the Bay Area of California. All names, schools and districts have been changed to protect their identity. Angela Watts, Martha Maples, and Jose Garcia are staying principals. Tomika Jones, Freda Calhoun, and Enrique Cortez are principals that have left their jobs. Two of the principals are African American, two are white and two are Hispanic/Latino. There are four females and two males. Martha Maples and Tomika Jones represent the same school district, Paramount. Freda Calhoun and Enrique Cruz are from Chester Unified School District. All other principals are from different school districts in large urban areas in Northern California Bay Area.

Table 3  
Background information on principals

<b>Principal</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Principal Yrs. Of Experience</b>	<b>School Name</b>	<b>Staying or Leaving</b>
Angela Watts	African American	Female	7	Willard Elementary	Staying Principal
Martha Maples	Caucasian	Female	15	Drew Elementary	Staying Principal
Jose Garcia	Hispanic/Latino	Male	7	True Elementary	Staying Principal
Tomika Jones	African American	Female	6	Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary	Leaving Principal
Freda Calhoun	Caucasian	Female	6	Shields Elementary	Leaving Principal
Enrique Cortez	Hispanic/Latino	Male	4	Kuna Prep Elementary	Leaving Principal

### **Staying Principals**

Dr. Angela Watts has been a principal for almost seven years at Willard Elementary in Sola Unified School District. She was a teacher at the school for two years before becoming the principal of the school. She is African American and in her mid forties. Though she describes herself as shy and quiet, she has a commanding presence when she walks through the school.

When I walked into her office, data about individual classrooms and grade levels were everywhere on the walls. Willard Elementary has almost 600 students. 67 percent students are Latino/Hispanic, 28 percent are African American, 3 percent are Asian, and the rest are other. 91 percent of students are identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged and almost 60 percent of the students are English learners.

While the school is ethnically diverse, there are many programs that meet the needs of students at Willard. Willard is a “Reading for All” school. Reading for All is a district mandated program. All classrooms are required to fully implement this reading program. In addition to the reading program, Willard offers a bilingual program, afterschool program and advanced math and technology programs. A highlight in Dr. Watts’ tenure at Willard is exiting Program Improvement status in her

fourth year as principal. Though Dr. Watts does not like talking about her individual accomplishments, she beams when referencing the academic achievements of students and school.

Martha Maples is White and in her early sixties. She is a seasoned principal with over 25 years of being in education. She has been the principal at Drew Elementary for the last four years in Paris Unified School District. This is her fourth school she has led in the district. Her office has piles of papers everywhere. There are left over prizes from events in one corner and merchandise from the student store in another corner of the room. There is no place for anything else in her office.

Drew Elementary is nestled in a quiet community in a large city. The school is very small and has roughly 300 students in Paris Unified School District. 64 percent of the students are African American, 15 percent are Hispanic/Latino, 5 percent Asian, and the rest other. 72 percent of the students are identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged and 13 percent of the students are English Learners. Drew Elementary exited Program Improvement status the first year Ms. Maples was principal of the school. The school has an API of less than 700.

Like Willard School, Drew Elementary is a “Reading for All” school. Reading for All requires teachers to teach reading 2 hours and 30 minutes each day. It is district mandated. Teaching “Reading for All” and Math everyday leaves very little time for other extra curricular activities. Though very little time is left for “fun” things, Mrs. Maples loves the programs and activities that showcase the talents of the students at the school.

Jose Garcia has been the principal at True Elementary in Roker Unified School District for the last seven years. He is Latino and in his mid forties. He is soft spoken and very “laid back.” His office is very neat and orderly. The school is located in a beautiful ethnically diverse neighborhood.

Inside Mr. Garcia office is a wall with the academic data for the school. Above the data on the wall, there is the target goal for the school. True Elementary API score is 767. It is not in Program Improvement. 42 percent of the students are White, 35 percent Latino/Hispanic, 19 percent African American, 4 percent Asian, and the rest Other. 51 percent of the students are identified as socioeconomic disadvantaged and 31 percent of the students are classified as English Learners.

True Elementary offers a variety of programs for students. “Reading for All” is the district adopted reading program. However, teachers have full discretion on its implementation. In addition, students participate in art, music, and physical education classes each week.

### **Leaving Principals**

Tomika Jones was the principal at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary for five years in Paramount School District. Ms. Jones is African American and in her late fifties. She is outgoing, charismatic and full of energy. Her school was located in a gentrified area north of a large urban city. In fact, many of the students in the neighborhood did not go her school.

There are less than 300 students at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary. Over 95 percent of the school is African American with 4 percent Latino/Hispanic. The schools API score is 604. The school was in Program Improvement when she left the job.

During Ms. Jones’ tenure as principal, the school was experienced declining enrollment. While most of the teachers are white and have been at the school for over twenty years, Mrs. Jones is African American and was the newest staff member at the school. Mrs. Jones felt a challenge for the community was that the school staff did not reflect the community.

Freda Calhoun was the principal of Shields Elementary for almost 6 years. She is white and in her early forties. She is outspoken, confident, and very intelligent.

Shields Elementary is located in a Chester Unified School District. While principal, the school served a little over 600 students. 37 percent of students were African American, 33 percent



Latino/Hispanic, 7 percent White, 7 percent Filipino and the rest, Other. 77 percent of the students are identified as socio economic disadvantaged and 19 percent are classified as English Learners. Shields Elementary School's API score was 685 when Ms. Calhoun left the job.

The school participated in several programs such as Federal (Program Improvement) and state, School Assistant Intervention Team (SAIT) and Quality Education Intervention Assistance (QEIA) programs. Program Improvement schools are identified by failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) and they are subject to improvements and sanctions. SAIT schools are identified by performing below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of the achievement tests and failed to meet academic growth requirements. QEIA is a state program is designed to help schools struggling with poverty or a severe lack of resources. In addition, the school implemented the district mandated Reading program, "Reading for All." The school provided many enrichment activities and programs to challenge students.

Enrique Cortez was the principal of Kuna Prep Elementary School in Chester Unified School District for 4 years. Kuna Prep was his first principalship. He is Hispanic and in his early forties. He has a quiet demeanor and is quite shy.

Kuna Prep Elementary School has a little over 700 students. 56 percent are Hispanic/Latino, 24 percent African American, 6 percent White, 3 percent Asian, and the rest, Other. Kuna Prep Elementary was in Program Improvement at the time of Mr. Cortez' tenure. In addition to Program Improvement, the school participated in several state mandated programs such as SAIT and QEIA. Also, the school implemented the district mandated program, "Reading for All."

Kuna Prep offered the only Dual Immersion bilingual elementary programs in the district. The Dual Immersion program was one of the main attractions to the school. In addition to the bilingual program, the school provided many after school services to students. In the following chapter, I'll report the results of the findings across principals—both leaving and staying.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

To say that urban schools are “challenging” is clearly an understatement. As previously stated, the urban school principalship is complex and demanding (Cistone and Stevenson, 2000). The expectation to turn around troubling schools places an enormous amount of political stress on principals. Under the scrutiny of parents, communities, and politicians, principals face an uphill battle to restore confidence in urban schools. With legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), school leaders are confronted with the harsh reality of consistently improving student achievement in the midst of adversity (NCLB, 2001).

The way in which leaders work in urban settings, the way they exert their power, and the resources they command play a role in understanding the challenges in urban leaders (Cuban, 2004). With the lack of resources, accountability demands and lack of public confidence in failing schools, close attention is being given to the politics in and around schools (Marshall & Scribner, 1991). The layers of responsibilities principals assume do not always come with corresponding authority (Portin, 2000). Navigating the combination of demands and accountability required principals to pay close attention to key stakeholders at the site. Managing relationships between parents, teachers and the district always involve power relations. Yet, few researchers actually investigate how power relations—and particularly, school leaders’ ability to navigate them—shape their decisions to stay or leave a district.

In this chapter, I argue that there are three sources of political stress for both staying and leaving principals: (1) mandated programs; (2) staffing issues; and (3) relationships with the district. In order for staying and leaving principals to achieve personal and professional goals at schools, there is a certain level of support needed from the district. Principals’ senses of self-efficacy (or competence at their jobs) resulted from the relative success (or not) of overcoming challenges. How well principals managed to negotiate relations played a role in this study whether they stayed with or left their schools.

### *Micropolitical Theory*

I drew upon micropolitical theory to interpret and explain power relations at school sites. Leadership is closely associated with power. As a reminder, Hoyle (1986) defines micropolitics as power, influence and control among individuals and groups in a social context within an organization. Micropolitics centers on the “strategic” use of power in an organization within the context of work-related goals (Blase, 1988a, 187b). Ball (1987) discusses micropolitics in terms of strategies of control as it relates to lack of consensus in the area of achieving goals and the occurrence of conflict over the results at schools. The political strategies staying and leaving principals deployed to influence others and protect themselves to pursue their interest—that is, the micropolitical strategies they employed—were important in determining how successful they were at their schools.

I’ll now address how the principals dealt with micropolitics in these three categories: (1) mandated programs; (2) staffing issues; and (3) relationships with the district.

### ***Mandated Programs***

The first source of political stress was mandated programs. Mandated programs are programs that are required by the district or school to be carried out by the school. As leaders of schools, it is the responsibility of the principal to ensure all mandated programs be fully implemented. School leaders in this study experienced mandated programs as demanding and controversial. These programs were a playground for micropolitical negotiation between the multiple stakeholder groups, who often had different positions on the efficacy and appropriateness of the programs. Staying and leaving principals identified three types of mandated programs that created political stress: federal, state and district. The main federal program that principals navigated was Program Improvement. Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), states are required to implement statewide accountability systems based on state standards in reading and mathematics. Schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) are subject to improvements and sanctions. In addition to Program Improvement, there are also state programs that underperforming schools must participate in. Two of the three leaving principals' participated in California's School Assistant and Intervention Team (SAIT) Program. SAIT schools are identified by performing below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of the achievement tests and failed to meet academic growth requirements. Two of the three leaving principals also participated in a second state program, which came on the heels of SAIT called Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA) program. Only schools at the bottom of the state's Academic Performance Index (deciles 1 and 2) qualify to participate in the program. QEIA is designed to help schools struggling with poverty or a severe lack of resources. Finally, all six schools navigated challenging district-initiated programs, particularly the "Reading For All" Program. This district-mandated reading program required strict implementation of a scripted approach to instruction. Table 4 describes the programs, sanctions and challenges for staying and leaving principals.

Table 4  
Challenging mandated programs

Principal	Programs	Requirements	Micropolitical Challenges
Angela Watts (Staying Principal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Improvement</li> <li>• Reading Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention Programs</li> <li>• Mandated Professional Development</li> <li>• Parent Meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control over budget</li> <li>• Strict accountability</li> <li>• Choice of Curriculum</li> </ul>
Martha Maples (Staying principal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Improvement</li> <li>• Reading Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplemental programs</li> <li>• Mandated Professional Development</li> <li>• Parent Meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strict accountability</li> <li>• Curriculum Choices</li> </ul>
Jose Garcia (Staying principal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>
Tomika Jones (Leaving principal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Improvement</li> <li>• Reading Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplemental programs</li> <li>• Mandated Professional Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of district support</li> <li>• Strict accountability</li> <li>• Curriculum choices</li> </ul>
Freda Calhoun (Leaving principal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IIUSP</li> <li>• Program Improvement</li> <li>• SAIT</li> <li>• QEIA</li> <li>• Reading Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplemental programs</li> <li>• Mandated Professional Development</li> <li>• Parent Meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of district support</li> <li>• Too many programs</li> <li>• Curriculum choices</li> <li>• Strict accountability</li> <li>• Public humiliation</li> </ul>
Enrique Cortez (Leaving principal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IIUSP</li> <li>• Program Improvement</li> <li>• SAIT</li> <li>• QEIA</li> <li>• Reading Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplemental programs</li> <li>• Mandated Professional Development</li> <li>• Parent Meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of district support</li> <li>• Curriculum choices</li> <li>• Strict accountability</li> <li>• Public Humiliation</li> </ul>

All principals under Program Improvement experienced sanctions; that is; they were told the consequences of what would happen if they could not do what they were told to do in specific areas. Five out of the six principals in my study faced a loss of control over budget, curriculum, and resources. In addition, there was increasing oversight and accountability from central office. These challenges made it difficult to navigate the political stress from the sanctions of Program Improvement. For example, parents were given more choices, teachers given less autonomy and principals less control to make decisions in the best interest of their school. While five out of the six principals experienced the challenges of Program Improvement, the way in which they navigated political challenges was different.

Leaving principals described their experiences under Program Improvement as debilitating, frustrating and embarrassing. As soon as test scores were published, the political stress took center stage for Calhoun, leaving principal. She describes her experience at the district's retreat. *If you didn't make your mark, you were not mentioned (at district welcome back celebration) and you were pulled in separately and asked what happened, what did you do, what went wrong? It was really emotional. It was a real—uhm, embarrassment. (Calhoun Int. 4/7/08 Lines 223-225)*

Calhoun was not recognized or acknowledged for the challenges and obstacles she faced at her Program Improvement school. There was a sense of isolation from peers because of her results. Also, the experience with her superiors left her feeling insecure regarding the achievement of her school.

While improving student achievement, Program Improvement principals were required to engage all parents in the decision making process. However, all three leaving principals had a different opinion of parent involvement than their district superiors. Calhoun describes the accountability and political stress parent engagements caused for her.

*This is how this is doing—This is how that is doing. So, there was a ton of repetitive, unnecessary work in my mind that we were expected at one point to have--you've got your ELAC right but then we had to have an African American meeting group, then we had to have an Asian American meeting group. We were supposed to have meetings with special groups talking about specifically how we're going help those students' needs and of course, we had our East Indian population. So it was just, it got silly after awhile. (Calhoun Int. 4/7/08 Lines 162-168)*

Calhoun's professional beliefs differed from the district's regarding parent involvement. It was difficult to support what she saw as excessive parent meetings when she did not believe in its purpose. While the purpose of Program Improvement was to improve student achievement, it created political stresses for all leaving principals. Calhoun felt the district was not thoughtful in what they prescribed schools to do under Program Improvement. Managing the day-to-day affairs along with the Program Improvement made the job more complex and challenging.

Leaving principals participated in more mandated programs than staying principals. Two of the three leaving principals were required to participate in School Assistant Intervention Team (SAIT), and Quality Education Intervention Assistance (QEIA). One component of SAIT and QEIA was having highly qualified teachers at the school. Cortez, leaving principal, describes the political turmoil with parents as a result of not fulfilling the requirements of a mandated program.

*The parents regularly voiced their concerns about this teacher not being qualified or the class not being staffed and trying to being understanding but being placed in the middle, it was so hard. You just don't know and not having the district to support me. I was out there by myself. I was caught in the middle. I was trying to make up an excuse to the parents trying to come up with something. But when the vacancy has gone unfilled for so long what can you say. These parents are on you. They are in your office everyday. I was stressed out. I don't know what to say up to this point other than to say the district isn't giving me any teachers so I can't really say that bluntly but I'm saying you need to help me out maybe speak to the district to see what's going on. But that's also another problem because they think I sent the parents and then they're mad at me but nobody is helping me. So I'm stuck. I'm trying not to point the finger at the district but at the same time trying to be responsive to the parents. (Cortez Int. 9/18/08 Lines 72-183)*

Without district support, Cortez felt that it was difficult to deal with the problem. He felt that it was the district's responsibility to provide schools with teachers. However, parents expected principals to have teachers in classrooms at the beginning of each year. Rallying parents to complain about lack of district support was not an option for Cortez. His only strategy was to place a substitute in the classroom or cover the classroom himself until the district sent him a teacher.

SAIT schools required principals to closely monitor instruction. Frequent unannounced visits to classrooms placed an enormous amount of political stress on two of the three leaving principals. Teachers resented these visits. Calhoun illustrates this point.

*I watched SAIT really demoralize the staff. It was hard to get them through that. (Calhoun Int. 4/07/08 Lines 53-54)*

As part of the SAIT requirements, Calhoun periodically met with teachers to discuss assessment results. She was required by the district to give an account of every child's performance at the school. If students did not meet benchmark proficiency, it was Calhoun's responsibility to monitor individualized learning plans for those students. The constant oversight of instruction caused teachers to be angry and distrustful of the principal.

Managing micropolitics at the site was extremely challenging and frustrating for all leaving principals. However, not only did two of three leaving principals had a greater number of mandated programs in their schools, they were less able to navigate the political stress while experiencing sanctions placed on their school.

While leaving principals found it difficult navigating the political stress of mandated programs, two of three staying principals found a way to be effective in the midst of adversity. Watts describes the experience of losing autonomy while at the same time managing the school.

*They (the school) went from having to provide the supplemental educational service, uhm and having parents getting a choice to uhm, the standards based curriculum where everybody had to do the same thing where you had to take out everything but the reading and writing. We automatically became a Reading For All school. You know there were lots of things. There was less, less, and less control over your school and it got to the point where when we got to year 4, I had no control over the budget. (Watts Int. 9/19/08 Lines 100-151)*

Though the political challenges were great, two of the staying leaving principals found a way to effectively deal with the harsh realities of the sanctions. For example, Watts describes the last sanction (removing the principal) by the district.

*The last sanction would have been to remove the principal and then change the actual teachers and it went in that order because of our union. I remember coming into my leadership and saying, look guys, this is real important. I'm learning this as I'm learning the principalship. You might need another administrator to do this and you need not be afraid to have that discussion because I'm here with you and we're in this together. So I'm putting this on the table and we need to talk about this. (Watts, 9/19/08 Lines 134-140)*

The conversation with staff and parents was tough for Watts. Everyone at the site was on notice of being removed from the school. The frustration and anxiety as a result of the sanctions left everyone powerless over the direction of the school. However, Watts did everything the district asked of her and more.

*The district asked me to do everything. Build a better mousetrap. They said throw out everything that you were doing and just do something new. I had to do it, we had to reinvent ourselves literally. We had look at every aspect of our program and change it and we had to put that in our plan and present it to the school board and tell them why it was different than before which is how we got to the point we have those teachers that are really different in their capacity to do the work and how they're looking at their practice because they evolved. (Watts Int. 9/19/08 Lines 167-173)*

Watts did not feel disempowered by the sanctions of mandates but a sense of urgency in exiting Program Improvement. She was able to effectively engage teachers and parents to do things differently to improve the overall performance of students.

All staying principals navigated mandated programs successfully. To ensure academic goals were met at sites, all three staying principals had imposed district-mandated curriculum. They were required to implement district wide reading program called "Reading For All". Implementing an externally imposed curriculum created political conflict and stress for all three staying principals. Maples illustrates this point.

*Well it wasn't that long ago when the district decided to do "Reading For All". Well (laughs), the teachers hated it. They felt they were being forced to do something they didn't want to do. So, they refused to do it and to make matters worse, they had the "Reading For All" Nazi's going around telling teachers what they can and cannot do. They would come into the room and say, this is wrong and that is wrong with your class. You need to change your room configuration. You need to change the alphabet cards. It was so many things. (Maples Int. 9/09/08 Lines 33-39)*

"Reading For All" reading program created a power struggle between Maples and the teachers. The teachers' trust in the principal was undermined by perception of principal cooption to enforce a program, which was unsupported by all the teachers.

*A lot of my teachers were mad at me, even the ones that I had a good relationship with. But I had to make them do the program. (Maples Int. 9/09/08 Lines 40-42)*

The power struggle created a stressful environment for the principal and the teachers. The decision to follow the district's mandated program was a classic example of micropolitics at

school sites. Maples felt that appeasing teachers at her school and giving them autonomy over the reading program would have placed her in an insubordinate position with the district:

*Like with Reading For All, we did it even though the teachers hated it, we did it. I wasn't compromising on districts initiatives. I have no problem following the rules. I would tell the teachers, there are some things we may not like but we have to do them. I don't make the rules, I just enforce them. And I would say to them, there are things I will go to battle for and there are other things that I'm just not going to fight and that was Open Court. We just have to do it. (Maples Int. 9/09/08 Lines 207-212)*

Though staying principals did not always agree on the professional goals of the district, they were successful navigating the political challenges of federal and district-mandated programs. Also, they found a way to unify teachers as in the examples of Watts and Maples. Both staying principals built a level of trust and credibility with stakeholders.

In contrast to staying principals, leaving principals struggled navigating the political challenges at their sites. There was a sense of isolation and retreat as in the case of Cortez and Calhoun. The political struggles continued from federal and state to district mandated programs. The flow of sanctions, restrictions and requirements were continuous. There was not a chance to regroup or strategize at the end of the day.

### ***Staffing Issues***

Staffing was the second source of micropolitical stress for staying and leaving principals alike. The process of hiring, evaluating, and firing teachers caused political turmoil at sites. Political interactions included racial and power plays by teachers that undermined the authority of staying and leaving principals alike. Hoyle (1986) identified several micropolitical strategies principals used with teachers: *dividing and ruling*, *co-optation*, *displacement*, *controlling information*, *controlling meetings and exchanges*. *Divide and ruling* involved avoiding full faculty meetings and or treating them as informational and then making deals with individual teachers regarding specific matters. *Co-optation* involved taking in the competition rather than isolate them. *Displacement* is disguising the real issue, which is often personal with a legitimate, professional one. *Controlling information* was the strategic acquisition, distribution, presentation, doctoring, and withholding of information. *Controlled meetings* involve selection of agenda items, interpreting "consensus," pressuring committee members, and massaging the minutes (Hoyle, 1986). Finally, *exchanges* involve "goods" that both teachers and principals have which they exchange with each other (Hoyle, 1986).

The strategies deployed by principals made a difference in whether they were effective in navigating micropolitical challenges at their site. In this study, the most common strategy principals deployed was cooptation. Table 5, describes the issues and micropolitical strategies principals used to advance their goals.



Table 5  
Staffing issues

<b>Principal</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Micropolitical Strategies</b>
<b>Angela Watts</b>	Staying principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom autonomy</li> <li>• Evaluating teachers</li> <li>• Teacher Expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-optation</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>Martha Maples</b>	Staying principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom autonomy</li> <li>• Transfer teachers</li> <li>• Substitutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-optation</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>Jose Garcia</b>	Staying principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom autonomy</li> <li>• Evaluating teachers</li> <li>• Discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-optation</li> <li>• Divide and ruling</li> </ul>
<b>Tomika Jones</b>	Leaving principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom autonomy</li> <li>• Evaluating teachers</li> <li>• Teaching assignments</li> <li>• Teacher expectations</li> <li>• Discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-optation</li> <li>• Controlled meetings</li> <li>• Divide and ruling</li> <li>• Displacement</li> </ul>
<b>Freda Calhoun</b>	Leaving principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom autonomy</li> <li>• Evaluating teachers</li> <li>• Prep period</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Schedules</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-optation</li> <li>• Controlled meetings</li> <li>• Divide and ruling</li> </ul>
<b>Enrique Cortez</b>	Leaving principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom autonomy</li> <li>• Evaluating teachers</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Race</li> <li>• Hiring Qualified Teachers</li> <li>• Substitutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-optation</li> <li>• Divide and ruling</li> <li>• Controlled meetings</li> <li>• Displacement</li> </ul>

Leaving principals identified more staffing challenges than staying principals. In addition to teachers' expectation and autonomy, leaving principals identified teaching assignments, getting substitutes at school, discipline, and scheduling as staffing issues that caused political stress. All principals stated that there was a certain level of autonomy teachers wanted to keep. Teachers wanted control over their classroom, curriculum, and schedules. Jones, leaving principal illustrates this point. Paraphrasing comments from teachers, Jones said:

*These principals can't tell me what to do. We have been here longer than they have. We know this community. We know who will go and who won't go, who will agree with us and who won't. We know the kids in this neighborhood. No principal is going to come in here and tell US what to do. They're not going to make any changes. This is the way we've done things for years and this is the way we're going to continue to do them. We let the last principal know, she tried to make some changes and certain things and we told her oh no, we're not going to do that but I, uhm, that was an example. It was so many things. Changing*

*the way they taught, the structure of their teaching day, teaching hour, it was almost impossible. (Jones Int. 5/24/08 Lines 138-147)*

Teachers' resistance to changes was a manifestation of conflicting interests in schools and was a common micropolitical challenge for two of three leaving principals. Most teachers had been at Jones' school twenty years. They had formed alliances. Jones was an outsider. The entrenched attitude of staff members towards Jones was overwhelming. To move the school forward, Jones had to negotiate power with teachers. Jones illustrates her point.

*If there had been certain ceremonies, certain ways of doing things that they had, they would refuse to change it even if it was no longer effective. I didn't change it. I let it go. I had to slowly introduce and try to help reshape things that I thought needed reshaping. Things that were fine, I didn't bother them. I didn't mess with the culture of that school. I had to work with them to slowly change things. (Jones Int. 5/24/08 Lines 152-157)*

Jones' micropolitical strategy was cooptation for handling classroom autonomy. To survive in an environment in which teachers had been together for a long time and had strong ties to the community required her to take her time and strategically pick and choose her battles. Jones started with less important issues before tackling rituals and ceremonies that were considered "dear" to teachers.

When principals wrestled with teachers over autonomy, it created political conflict with parents, the district and other teachers. For example, teachers were responsible for schedules and classroom assignments at Jones' school. However, many parents did not always agree with those assignments. Jones illustrated the political tension she had to navigate between teachers and parents that did not want their child in their classes.

*Parents were coming to me and saying we don't, well, I was in Miss So and So's room, I do not want my child in his or her room. I was getting a lot of that from parents. I could relate to some of those parents because I wouldn't want my child some of those rooms either. So many of the teachers thought that this is the way its been, this is the way it's going to be but the neighborhood was shifting. (Jones Int.5/24/08 Lines 157-160)*

While Jones negotiated with parents over classroom assignments, teachers had to be pacified as well. In this case, Jones deployed the micropolitical strategy of displacement. She disguised her personal feelings about the situation with a professional, legitimate reason to resolve the situation. As she states, everything is done in the best interest of students. But for the teachers, Jones did not add "even though she would not want her own child in these teacher's classrooms."

### ***Hiring, Firing and Evaluating Teachers***

Hiring, firing and evaluating teachers involved power relations at school sites. Micropolitics came into play when principals selected or received transferred teachers that had different beliefs about kids than the school. This created an uncomfortable environment for students and teachers. Maples illustrated this point.

*Well the disappointing thing for me in the district is there are times where you can't hire because of the teacher contract, reconfiguration of schools and all so sometime you get people that you haven't hired and so it's much more difficult to get them on the team and moving forward for kids you know. A lot of time they're resisters because they came from reconfigured schools that didn't want them for one reason or another. I got four in one*

*year but the next year they were gone because they knew when they came here they were going to have to work. It was a whole year of missed opportunities because you didn't have a team that was really moving with you to improve academic achievement. (Maples Int. 9/19/08 Lines 59-66)*

Staying principal Maples felt equally disempowered by the district when disenfranchised teachers were replaced at her school. Negative attitudes from disenfranchised teachers delayed the progress of moving the school forward in a positive direction.

Another example of micropolitics is when teachers banded together and solicited the support of colleagues and parents. For example, five out of the six principals found themselves disagreeing with teachers over discipline. Garcia, leaving principal illustrates his point.

*The staff is a very closely knit staff and which has a lot of pluses. They really support each other, uh, when there's a um, hardships with regards to dealing with challenging students, but what also happens at times is that there'll be a situation where um, you know either the teacher is frustrated or I feel that we as a school could handle a situation differently and I think the end result would be that would be better for the child and the family, but at the same time, the teacher is looking for support and that support is projected out with the rest of the staff. You know, how are you going to support this teacher? And so, you are caught as an administrator as dealing with well alright, "well how am I going to support this teacher because it's going to be spread out amongst everybody else in the staff, but at the same time to see about how we can change what we're doing in this particular situation to help benefit the child. So, you know that comes up a lot. It really does and it comes up where uh, in the most difficult of situations, where again you're trying to help a family with a child but then you're also trying to support the teacher and also trying to make sure that the rest of the staff knows that you're supporting the teacher but you're also working with the family. (Garcia Int. 6/28/08 Lines 103-113)*

Power struggles with teachers over discipline created political stress for Garcia. Both parents and teachers felt unsupported over the issue of student discipline. To resolve the situation, there was an "exchange" of services and goods with teachers. This micropolitical strategy was common for all six principals.

*I was helpful in a sense, if there'd be an emotionally supportive (response) or trying to find resources or um, uh, you know, giving up, giving some ideas, uh, then, then that's what we're all about. (Garcia Int. 6/28/08 Lines 188-190)*

Negotiating student consequences required Garcia to provide resources or additional support to teachers. At the same time, he had to work with parents regarding students' behavior. Managing the political stress between the two parties was time consuming.

### **Evaluation**

The final staffing issue that elicited micropolitics was staff evaluation. While staffing the school was problematic at times for most staying and leaving principals, evaluating teachers was another political issue. Supervision, as defined, interpreted, and practiced, and its influence on teachers, teaching, and learning, serves to advantage some stakeholders and disadvantage others (Blase & Blase, 2002). Five out of six principals found the evaluation process very political. Disagreements over observations often involved other teachers, parents and the district.

Principals utilized district policies or teacher's contract as the ultimate power managing relations with teachers. Garcia, staying principal, described the experience.

*I had to go through writing up process and giving them the negative feedback and then it escalating to uh, you know dealing with termination procedures. That's a lot of work! That's a lot of work for an administrator and it a lot of stress on the teacher. It creates a lot of stress and division amongst the staff and I certainly think the community. You know, you're writing the teacher up and she tells her friends. Now she's drumming up support from them and now they're all mad at you. You're the bad guy and you can't say anything while all those rumors are going out at the school and to the parents. Oh, and their mad because they heard you don't like the teacher. So you got some supporters of a particular teacher and there also some naysayers, and what happens is unlike, let's say the private sector, where it's a much cleaner, quicker process. This can go on for a long time in education. In the meanwhile, you know you have this teacher creating a negative impact in the classroom and throughout the school for a long time. And so, it creates stresses, it creates a lot of stresses and you know it creates a lot of odd moments where you have to be working together. Now, you're on this collision course where things are just going to get, get worse. (Garcia Int. 7/18/09 Lines 206-216)*

The political fallout created an enormous amount of stress for Garcia. Disgruntled teachers created a negative impact on the school climate and culture. Though there were rumors floating around the school and in the community about teachers not receiving support, Garcia was not at liberty to discuss the confidentiality of a teacher's performance with anyone. He was isolated and alienated from the teachers. Since he wasn't successful in this area of teacher evaluation, he survived by strengthening other areas (see the discussion of working with teacher's union below.)

In many cases disagreements over teachers' performance involved the teachers union. While all six principals found themselves negotiating contract language with union leaders, two of the three leaving principals describe their relationship with the union as tumultuous. These principals had union officials teaching at their school. They were veteran teachers and very powerful at the school and in the district. Jones illustrates her point:

*She (union vice president) was very powerful within the district and within the school of course. If the union had some political agenda or something that was going on, she would bring it into the school and when they had their meetings, I didn't attend but later I would hear what went on. She would tell people we're either going to go this way or we're going that way and the teachers would not buck her. They would not go against her. Whatever she said, they would do for the most part. It was like they didn't really see, I don't know, it was difficult, it's difficult to kind of explain it. (Jones Int. 5/24/08 Lines 171-177)*

While leaving and staying principals found the union to be quite challenging, staying principals were able to navigate relationships better than leaving principals. All three staying principals describe the union as "crossing the line" at times. However, they describe their relationship with the union as "good." For example, Garcia, staying principal described his relationship with the union.

*I try to be uh, create a collaborative working environment with regards to the teacher rep and in the past, depending on who is the rep, uh, we've been able to work, you know, very closely, uh, you know they would come in and express the concerns of the teachers and, and uh, the*

*staff and you know I would try to respond appropriately. But um, also, there are times when I feel that uh, my current situation with the union rep is that she crosses the line vs. where there's contractual obligations, and I should definitely hear about the contractual obligations right, especially if I'm violating them. But then there are other things that I feel, you know in her position she's, she gets involved in, and, and doesn't think they're appropriate because they're not in violation of the contract. (Garcia Int.6/28/08 Lines 228-235)*

While working collaboratively with the union, there was an “exchange of goods” Garcia deployed to advance his interest at the school. He understood the role of union officials and the power they yielded over their colleagues. Though all six principals cited the contract, ultimate authority, to advance their goals, staying principals were better able to navigate the politics more effectively as in the case of Garcia.

The most common micropolitical strategies employed by principals were cooptation, negotiation, and exchange. Since leaving principals experienced more staffing issues, they often deployed these micropolitical strategies at their site. However, it was not clear that these strategies were always effective, especially for leaving principals and the time and energy expended on navigating power relations with teachers was politically exhausting.

In summary, while the role of principal was difficult for all principals, leaving principals were confronted with more political challenges in the area of staffing than staying principals. In addition to wrestling with teacher autonomy and evaluation, leaving principals struggled with teacher assignments, discipline, prep periods, schedules and race. Principals felt that teachers used colleagues, parents and the union to undermine the principals' leadership. The attacks on principals impacted their reputation and trust with the community.

### **Race**

I also examined race as a context issue for micropolitical activity. I expected it to be an issue since three of the six principals were placed at schools where the ethnicity of the majority of students was different from than their own race. However, I was surprised that race did not play a major role in power relations at schools—or a least it was not mentioned as an issue. Only one principal suggested that ethnicity was a problem in his interaction with parents and teachers. Cortez, leaving principal, is Latino. Cortez's school is fifty six percent Latino and twenty four percent are African American. However, there are disproportionate numbers of African American students disciplined and suspended at the school. Cortez describes an encounter with an African American parent.

*Trying to hold kids and parents accountable at the same time being supportive and let them see that I'm supportive of them and the kids. I remember being called by—just a couple of instances come to mind—one time somebody mentioned to the school office they referred to me as that stupid Mexican principal. . It was tough and hurtful after all the things I had done for the groups at the school. Whatever the decision I had made, I don't remember what it was and then by an African American mother, obviously not the same one that raved about me but another one when it came to discipline her child, she told me that I only cared about the Latino kids. So, I umm, you know, that's when you get a little depressed and uh, you're going to get that. It just hurts when you're working so hard. (Cortez Int. 5/10/08 Lines 244-253)*

Parents at Cortez’s school used the “race card” as a strategy to undermine his leadership. The comments were hurtful and damaging to the principal’s reputation at the school and in the community. However, no other principal reported race as an issue.

### ***Relationships with the District***

The third source of micropolitical stress for principals was the relationship with the school district. This relationship was especially important because it affected the principals’ abilities to navigate the other sources of micropolitical activities discussed with mandated programs and staffing issues. Hierarchical authority, policy, and cultural norms, for example, were political factors consciously used by the district to control or influence principals. How well principals managed to negotiate their interests and goals at the site played a role in whether they stayed or left challenging urban schools. Table 3 describes issues and types of support the district provided to principals.

Table 6  
District issues

<b>Principal</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Type of support</b>
<b>Angela Watts</b>	Staying principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing mandated programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High level of support</li> </ul>
<b>Martha Maples</b>	Staying principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing mandated programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High level of support</li> </ul>
<b>Jose Garcia</b>	Staying principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing mandated programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium level of support</li> </ul>
<b>Tomika Jones</b>	Leaving principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing mandated programs</li> <li>• Lack of respect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little support</li> </ul>
<b>Freda Calhoun</b>	Leaving principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing mandated programs</li> <li>• Lack of respect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little support</li> </ul>
<b>Enrique Cortez</b>	Leaving principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing mandated programs</li> <li>• Removing problem teachers</li> <li>• Lack of support hiring teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No support</li> </ul>

All three staying principals received a great deal of support from the district whereas all three leaving principals received little to no support from the district. Cortez, leaving principal, describes the lack of support from the district.

*I had the, the last year that I left, about the year before I left, I took on the union president who happened to be at my school (laughs) and I tried, I tried to move her, tried to, you know, release her. We went all the way to the board. We checked to go, we speak to the board in close session. Ultimately they ended up keeping her there, not moving her. (Cortez Int. 5/10/08 Lines 144-148)*

Removing extremely difficult teachers from the school required district support. The paperwork, the political stress, and time spent on these challenging teachers ended at the school board. The district's ultimate decision to keep the teacher at Cortez's school was embarrassing and publically humiliating to the school and community. As a result, it undermined his power and his ability to lead the school. The district's ability to undermine the principal in other ways was true for Calhoun as well.

*Other people, I just didn't feel had my back as much for lots of different reasons. We were also a SAIT school and at the end of last year, we were recommended for QEIA, I was given the option from my ed service's department to go for it or not go for it. I brought it to the staff, presented it, but gave the spin of let's not do this now, we're still SAIT. We've got to get out of SAIT and after I went through all that, ED services said, Oh, by the way now it's not optional. You're going to have to do it anyway which really ah, it just really had me because I thought you told me it was a option, I brought it to the staff like this now it seems like I'm not knowledgeable. It seems that you're pressuring something down. I don't stand behind this right now. I think—I watched SAIT really demoralize the staff. It was hard to get them through that. So then it became the staff wanting it, especially with CTA's pressure-- the District saying Diane you can't choose or not choose and, there was a point when I actually said to my assistant sup of Ed service, I said if you push this down after you already said it was optional, it's gonna ruin a lot of credibility I have with my staff, everything I've laid out. (Calhoun Int. 4/7/08 Lines 45-71)*

The lack of support by the district undermined Calhoun's leadership at the school. Since Calhoun decided to opt out of the program, the district placed the decision in the hands of teachers. The incentive the district focused on was class size reduction for teachers. Calhoun was forced to take another vote. In this case the teachers overwhelmingly approved the program. As a result, Calhoun lost credibility and respect with staff members.

In sharp contrast to leaving principals, staying principals found the district to be very resourceful and supportive of personal and professional goals. Staying principals perceived that they were trusted and respected by their district supervisors. For example, Watts describes the support from the district in the following way:

*I really believed that they believed in me. So I couldn't fail. At least as far as I was concerned, cause I was starting at the ground floor so, um, and if there was something I wanted to try, if I felt confident that I could get staff to move with me. They kind of said ok fine, let's see what you can do and so, uh, then I just went about the business of making it happen. As long as I was able to do that, then you know, things worked out ok. I knew the district would support me. I kind of knew that I had their vote of confidence. Uhm, I would say now, um, the thing becomes, I have a reputation that's probably bigger, um, than what I feel that I'm able to do. I guess it's because of all the things I achieved at the school while I have been here. So I think it's probably two sides to that, but it's always been pretty ok relationships with my administrators and my supervisors in the district office. (Watts Int. 6/18/08 Lines 158-168)*

The level of support Watts received from central office fostered confidence. She described her environment as collaborative and nurturing. Maples, also a staying principal had a similar experience with her district:

*I felt they've (the district) always been supportive and I guess I was lucky and I felt if I went there to ask them for help that they would help me get through it. I don't bother the executive officers very much. (Maples Int.6/24/08 Lines 396-398)*

The support Maples received from the district made a difference navigating the political stress at the site. Whenever she needed support, it was there for her. She had built trust and respect with her superiors. This allowed her to successfully pursue her professional and personal goals.

In summary, having a supportive and collaborative relationship with the district made a difference in the success of leaving and staying principals. Because staying principals had a positive relationship with the district, they were better able to navigate political challenges. Without the support from central office, leaving principals were less able to handle the micropolitics at their site.

### ***Micropolitics and the School Leaders' Self-Efficacy***

District support was crucial for principals' ability to successfully navigate the micropolitical challenges they faced on a weekly basis. Without the ability to successfully navigate micropolitical tensions, principals experienced a loss of their self-efficacy. When principals felt that they could no longer do a good job, they made the decision to leave their schools and districts.

Psychologist Albert Bandura defines self-efficacy as our belief in our ability to succeed in specific situations (Bandura, 1994). Cortez, leaving principal was at a loss of achieving personal and professional goals without district support. Cortez describes the feeling:

*I never knew exactly the reason but eventually, there was a mutual decision for me to leave and the superintendent wasn't going to recommend that I come back either. We just weren't on the same page. I just wasn't feeling it anymore. (Cortez Int. 5/10/08 Lines 129-134)*

There was a definite disconnect between Cortez and the district achieving his goals. He felt isolated and alienated. Though it was a mutual decision to leave his job, it was based on years of struggling and feeling inadequate as a leader.

Since central office had ultimate authority over schools, having the same professional beliefs was important for success. Calhoun's decision to not participate in QEIA was overturned by the teachers with full support of the district. This left her humiliated, embarrassed and feeling powerless. She felt that the support she needed to be successful was not there from the district office.

*If I felt like I was really going to be supported, I probably would have hung on another year and see how it went, but that piece of saying, gosh, being humiliated in front of teachers and not thinking I was getting through, no, I can't go through a year and not having my people who really are going to help me get through, by saying, what can I do to help you-- I'll be right there. That was one of the main reasons for leaving. (Calhoun Int.4/7/08 Lines 450-454)*

Calhoun's reputation was important to her. It gave her credibility with her staff. Without district support, it was difficult to navigate the micropolitics at her site. This was true for Jones as well. Jones felt no connection to her district supervisor. There was very little trust and respect. Jones described her feelings:



*I was outdone. It was like, she didn't like me or my style and she and I didn't see eye to eye and I thought she spoke rather contemptuously to the principals and spoke down to them. I was at one principal's meeting when I decided we are all grown up in here, no one has to put up with that kind of stuff—even though she wasn't speaking to me directly, she was just speaking generally. I was like, aah, I DO NOT, I WILL NOT WITH THIS FOOLISHNESS! THIS IS JUST UNPROFESSIONAL! It is, I cannot, I watched, I cannot put up with this. I walked to the personnel office that day and turned in my resignation. This was, I think April. I just felt that things was spiraling—had spiraled out of control in Oakland, and instead of the supervisor surrounding the principals, giving them more support, in the midst of its Tsunami, she was saying, you're going to have bury your own hatchets. Everybody is on their own. I was appalled and I said I cannot, I can no longer stay here. This is unfathomable for me. I walked that day as I said and turned in my resignation. I said when the supervisors need to surround these principals with support as much as they can in the midst of the storm instead of saying hey, you're going to have to do more when, it was just in such a cold way. I said it's just not a place for me. I no longer need to be here. (Jones Int. 5/24/08 Lines 204-244)*

It was troublesome to manage a school without the respect and trust of the district. Jones felt disempowered and disenfranchised. She resigned.

While leaving principals felt a loss of efficacy, staying principals felt a sense of success in the way they managed the micropolitical terrain. They had built a level of trust with their superiors. For example, Watts described her first year:

*Whenever I needed support, they were there. I didn't feel, um, so, pretty much, um there is like this tight rope I had to learn to walk. They really held my hand in my first year. (Watts Int. 6/18/08 Lines 135-13).*

Watts was better able to navigate micropolitical tension because she was surrounded by district support. She was in an environment in which she was nurtured. The district was aware of the issues and problems face daily and “held her hand.” Holding her hand allowed her not to fail but to succeed. Her sense of self-efficacy was strong.

While Maples and Garcia were veteran principals, they were more independent than Watts. Maples was in a large district while Garcia in a very small district. Maples felt a need to have a supportive person between her and the district to navigate the micropolitical tension. Maples illustrate this point.

*You need a go between because this such a large district that if you were just the superintendent and then me and with so many schools, I'm not sure I would ever get served very well or supported. My person always looked out for me. (Maples Int. 6/24/08 Lines 402-404)*

Having a “go to” person made a difference navigating micropolitics at Maples' site. She knew her district supervisor was going to support her through troubling times. Her sense of self-efficacy remained intact. Garcia, on the hand, was in a smaller district in which principals operated in silos, independent of the superintendent unless there was a problem. Garcia describes his district:

*One of the things about my district, I love it dearly, is they never come by the site. I mean they are never here. And there are pluses to that in the sense that uh, basically, you don't have anyone breathing down your back. (Garcia Int. 6/28/08 Lines 246-249).*

Garcia loved the fact the district never bothered him at all. He was able to manage the day-to-day problems independently of central office. He felt he did not need the district “breathing down his back” to navigate power relations at his site. He had developed a level of self-efficacy as a principal without the district.

### **Summary**

The role of principal is challenging and complex at school sites. Leaving and staying principals experienced a multitude of issues daily. Staying and leaving principals identified three sources of micropolitical stress: 1) mandated programs; 2) staffing issues, including hiring, firing, racial, and power plays by teachers; undermining principal authority; and 3) relationships with the district.

The most difficult relationship to manage for leaving principals was the district. Due to a lack of support by the district, leaving principals felt isolated disempowered and disenfranchised. This led to a loss of a sense of self-efficacy. In contrast to leaving principals, staying principals had supportive and collaborative relationship with central office. They were able to better navigate micropolitical tension at school sites. Their senses of self-efficacy (or competence at their jobs) resulted from the relative success of overcoming those challenges.

## CHAPTER 5: Implications for Practice and Research

There is growing concern with principal turnover in urban schools. School districts are struggling to find qualified and effective principals to lead schools. With accountability on the rise and increasing demands on the job, the role of urban principal has become more challenging than in the previous years. We know that principals are critical to the success of reform efforts. They are social and political agents managing power relations with key stakeholders. Retaining highly qualified leaders is essential to improving the overall performance of urban schools.

Understanding why some principals' leave and others stay in challenging urban schools is important to the education community. In my study, I have found that there are three sources of micropolitical stress for leaving and staying principals: 1) mandated programs; 2) staffing issues, including hiring, firing, racial, and power plays by teachers; undermining principal authority; and 3) relationships with the district.

Leaving principals found the most difficult relationship to manage was the district. They felt a lack of support and respect from district supervisors. Without this support, they found it difficult to manage micropolitical issues with other stakeholders in their schools. Absent the ability to manage micropolitics, these principals lost a sense of self-efficacy (or feeling of competence at the jobs). In contrast to leaving principals, staying principals had supportive and collaborative relationship with central office. They were able to better navigate micropolitical tension at school sites. Their relative success of overcoming those challenges led to feelings of self-efficacy.

This study has a number of implications for practice and research: 1) district support for urban schools and 2) navigating micropolitics. For implications for research, I have identified two key areas: 1) linking micropolitical literacy with self-esteem and 2) linking micropolitical literacy to principals' decision to leave the job. These implications will contribute to the small body of literature on urban principal turnover and to the practices of school districts.

### Implications for Practice

In this section, I explore implications for practice in two areas of educational leadership: 1) district support for urban principals and 2) navigating micropolitics. Addressing these areas could potentially increase the overall knowledge of school districts in efforts to retain highly qualified and effective leaders. As school districts are made of aware of these issues, they can take steps to increase the leadership capacity of their administrators.

#### *District Support for Urban Schools*

In building the capacity of school leaders, it is important that school districts pay close attention to cultivating, nurturing and sustaining principals. It may lead to increasing self-efficacy in principals. This dissertation shows that principals' relationships with districts impacted their ability to navigate relationships with other stakeholders. The three leaving principals in my study found a lack of support, respect and trust from the district. They felt that their supervisors undermined their professional and personal goals at the school. Staying principals on the other hand described their relationship with the district as positive and supportive. They identified clear expectations from district officials and time to talk and reflect on key issues at the site. Staying principal Ms. Watts expressed cooperation with the district supervisor: she was a sounding board for her concerns and helped to deal with issues at the site.

Engaging principals in authentic conversations would help district officials understand principals' leadership styles, their thinking around critical issues and the tasks confronting them. Though the principals in my study participated in regular meetings with supervisors, each one complained about not having any time to dialogue about key issues impacting their work. Having more opportunities to share ideas about their work could have prevented three of the principals in my study from leaving the job.

As new reforms, initiatives, and social and political issues come to surface, school districts must provide up to date training for administrators. This may lead to building self-efficacy in leaders. For example, if the district had informed Calhoun, leaving principal, of the political implications of not participating in QEIA, the outcome might have been different. Calhoun's decision not to participate in the program was overturned by teachers and the district. This was embarrassing and humiliating to her. It impacted her confidence as the administrators, particularly when she had to address other issues in later months. As Calhoun stated in her interview, it was pivotal in her decision to leave the job. If new initiatives and mandates are politically important to school districts then principals need to be made aware of these implications and be provided professional development for successful implementation.

One way of increasing principals' knowledge is through on-going professional development. Five out of the six principals stated that professional development meetings were relegated to operational issues. There was no focus on building their skill base as professional leaders. However, the National Staff Development Council (2001) charges that professional development must be job embedded and on-going and take place within the delivery system that is supportive of adult learning theory. That is, the sessions should be structured so that the principals are engaged and actively involved in the process and that activities and new knowledge must be tied to prior learning.

Another problem for the three leaving principals faced was finding resources and support to implement and sustain quality programs at their school. All three leaving principals were at Program Improvement schools. Since these schools had been identified as failing and not meeting academic targets, then the onus should fall on the school district to secure appropriate programs and funding to help these schools succeed or exit Program Improvement. For example, when Cortez, a leaving principal wanted to implement an afterschool tutoring program for struggling students, the district failed to provide busing for the school. Without the necessary resources and support, the battle to exit Program Improvement became that much harder for the school.

One possible solution is for school districts to identify key programs with a proven track record of success in urban schools; then fund these programs for schools. Securing busing for students could have helped a significant number of students. This could have led to the overall performance of the school, thus possibly exiting program improvement.

School districts must recognize that principals are instructional and managerial agents for transformation at their site. They are key to school reform. If school districts are concerned with retention of principals then initiatives and mandates must be prioritized and supported accordingly. Five out of six principals were in Program Improvement schools. In addition to Program Improvement, two of three leaving principals were School Assistant Intervention Team (SAIT) schools. In addition to being at schools identified as Program Improvement and SAIT, these schools had mandated scripted reading programs and a host of other district initiatives. All of these programs and initiatives came with increased accountability and responsibility. This dissertation suggests that districts monitor the number of programs mandated at a school. The

programs should be coordinated and achievable. Those schools having a significant number of programs should receive more district attention and support. Adding additional personnel at the site to assist in implementing these programs, for example, might take away the amount of work and stress principals feel on the job.

There are no easy “fixes” to the ills of education. However, it should not be trial and error. The three leaving principals in my study did not fathom the hurdles they encountered on the job while trying to raise student achievement nor did they anticipate the number of political/relational issues that would hinder them in accomplishing their goals. Nevertheless, they learned what to do and not to do by making mistakes on the job; and in the case of the three leaving principals, some of these mistakes were costly. For example, Cortez, leaving principal, received no training on how to successfully manage situations with difficult teachers. Thus, he had no skills when he chose to challenge a powerful union official. If the district provided training on how to successfully manage difficult employees in conflict-ridden situations, perhaps his outcome would have been different. Unfortunately, he learned what not to do after the experience was over. Many of these costly mistakes can be avoided if school districts provide leadership modules that address “real life” issues for its principals. This may add to a principal’s toolbox of leadership skills.

In summary, facilitating good relationships between school district personnel and principals is important for principal survival and success. However, it is suggested that school districts provide an environment that fosters trust, collegiality and collaboration. This may lead to principals feeling that they can share critical issues without feeling intimidated or incompetent on the job. Creating an environment that is conducive to learning may lead to more principals opening up about the demands of the job. Principals may be able to voice their concerns about the number of mandated programs and their capacity to deal effectively with numerous initiatives. Having better communication with principals may help district officials know when principals are at their “breaking” point. When Watts, staying principal, felt she was at her breaking point, she credits her supervisor for being by her side getting her through those difficult times. Watts’ supervisor recognized that she needed support and provided the appropriate resources to take away the anxiety and fears in tackling tough issues. The immediate interventions led to Watts’s successfully navigating power relations with stakeholders. If the three leaving principals’ supervisors paid attention to their subordinates struggling, it could have led to effective interventions and perhaps stop some of them from leaving the job.

### *Navigating Micropolitics*

This dissertation also showed that micropolitics mattered at school sites. How well principals managed power relations was critical to understanding why some principals left and others stayed at challenging schools. This implies that districts should build micropolitical literacy by talking about power relations with principals and discussing successful strategies dealing with major stakeholders at school sites such as teachers, parents and the district.

Principals may not understand that while they are in the midst of power relations with stakeholders, they are engaging in micropolitics. School administrators must be made aware of the political realities in the world of education. Without knowledge of micropolitics, beginning principals can run adrift in their first couple of years of leadership, focused only on the managerial and skills level of leadership (Tooms, Kretovics, & Smialek, 2007). Having micropolitical literacy may have led to different decisions made by leaving principals. For example, if Cortez, leaving principal, knew beforehand that waging a war against the union

president that resided at his school was going to be disastrous, would he have taken on that challenge? Having knowledge of micropolitics may have helped him strategize on who and what was needed to be successful in removing the teacher from his school. If Calhoun, leaving principal, knew that refusing to implement QEIA was going to backfire on her, would she have suggested the school move forward with implementation. Having the knowledge of micropolitics would have helped her gauge the district's perspective before making a decision that led to embarrassment and humiliation.

Managing power relations in school districts led to successful experiences for staying principals. They knew how to work with all stakeholders. They were confident and comfortable managing micropolitics. Building micropolitical knowledge may help principals with strategies dealing with teachers, parents and the district.

### **Implications for Research**

This study has implications for future research. Up to this point, there has been very little attention given to managing power relations between principals and stakeholders. This dissertation only touched the surface of micropolitics. However, my study contributed to the field of education in the following areas: 1) uncovering how micropolitics impacts principal performance and 2) linking micropolitical literacy on principal's decision to leave the position.

The three leaving principals had difficulty navigating power relations with stakeholders. This led to a loss of self-confidence in their leadership abilities. For example, when Cortez, leaving principal found out that the war with the union official was lost, he was devastated. After completing an enormous amount of documentation and conducting several meetings to prepare for a final dismissal, the union official was exonerated. To add more insult to injury, the union official was allowed to remain at the school. As stated in Mr. Cortez interview, he lost hope in terms of how to proceed with difficult teachers after that situation.

Prior to my study, most research conducted on principal retention was through surveys. Surveys are limiting because they 1) are self-reported data, and 2) do not address issues of micropolitics. We know from this more in-depth study that the job was stressful due to the long hours, accountability, compensation, working with difficult teachers and a host of other variables. Through interviews with principals, such as Cortez, I was able to show how micropolitical stress found on the job impacted on principals' confidence and their ability to make decisions. When leaving principals felt that the district no longer supported them, they felt powerless. There is more to learn in this area such as how to recognize, discuss and act upon power relations that impact the job.

This research also showed that the lack of micropolitical literacy to principals' decision to leave their job. Managing power relations with stakeholders is important. This study showed what happened when principals are unsuccessful navigating micropolitical activity at their sites. Though this study linked micropolitics to principals leaving, research could be extended to successful strategies deployed by principals that have been effective navigating power relations with stakeholders. This would help guide future leaders as they work in challenging urban schools.

While my study relied on interviews with principals, future research should explore understanding why principals stay or leave challenging schools through observations. The findings in observations might be different than relying on just personal interviews with principals. For example, observations would help me see how principals interact with

stakeholders. This could be different from what they say they do (interviews with principals) than what they are observed doing (observation). This would strengthen findings on how principals manage power relations with teachers, parents and the district. The researcher could record strategies deployed by both principals and stakeholders. Interviews alone with principals provide one perspective and were a limitation of this study. Observations could complete the picture of how

### ***Concluding Summary***

In summary, this study has revealed the tip of the iceberg on principal retention in urban schools. I have provided some insight into why some principals stay while others leave under the same conditions. Principals who left their positions had the greatest difficulty managing power relations with district personnel. This dissertation suggests that principals and school district pay more attention to micropolitics at school sites. Having micropolitical might help sustain a stronger leadership pool in urban schools.

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APPENDIX A  
Interview Protocol #1

Date:

Time:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position:

DE: I'm going to tell you a little about my study and then I'll ask you a few questions. My general research is understanding why some principals leave and others stay in challenging schools. The reason I'm interested in this area is because it will inform school districts in efforts to retain good leaders in urban schools.

1. What originally attracted you administration?
2. Describe the demographics of the school you left or current school?
3. How long have you been/were there?
4. Describe your most rewarding day on the job? What makes it rewarding?
5. Describe the worst day on the job? What makes it difficult?
6. Have there been times that you considered leaving the position? If so, give a concrete example.
7. Tell me about two experiences that describe a positive and negative relationship with teachers.
8. Describe your relationship with the teacher's union? Please give me an example to illustrate?
9. Tell me about two experiences that describe 2 different relationships with the district office?
10. Tell me about 2 experiences that describe your relationship with the community?
11. How do district policies, or initiatives impact the way you do your job?

12. How does NCLB influence the nature of your work?
13. How does politics impact the way you do your job? Please give 2 examples to illustrate?
14. Is the job the same as you thought it was going to be?
15. Describe the support or resources you've been given by the District office to do your job?
16. Is there anything the school district could have done to keep you in your school? What has the school district done to keep you in your position?
17. What message would you give urban superintendents to make principals successful in urban schools?

APPENDIX B  
Interview Protocol #2

Date:

Time:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position:

DE: I want to thank you for allowing me to interview you for my study. Your comments from our last meeting were very informative. After going through my interview notes, I had a few clarifying questions to ask you.

You stated that.... Could you tell me more about that?

Could you give me an example of what you meant by ...?