

BALANCING THE SCALES OF WELLNESS:
A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' WELLNESS

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DEDICATION

To my children, Spencer Elisabeth and Harrison Dean. They are my highest hope and greatest accomplishment. I must thank Sam, without whom I would never have had the strength and the will to finish this project. I'm thankful he believed in me, even when I doubted myself. I appreciate my family and friends whose unwavering faith kept me motivated to succeed. Finally, to the everlasting friendships formed in Cohort 24: Mike, Elizabeth, Connie, Karen, Kristi, and Felicity. I learned so much from all of them and will be forever grateful for their encouraging emails, texts, and regular check-ins for the last 3 years.

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ABSTRACT

The job of high school principal is demanding and time consuming. Often principals must make sacrifices or compromises with their health, time, social life, and core values in order to meet the needs of all stakeholders in their community. Using a multidimensional wellness model as a framework, this qualitative research reports how 10 high school principals in Kansas perceived their own wellness and whether or not their jobs contributed to, or detracted from, their wellness overall. The risk of burnout and possible turnover when a principal is not well is costly to a school district and its community. The findings indicate that while participants found aspects of the job fulfilling, enriching, and an enhancement to their wellness, certain stressors routinely experienced on the job compromised their wellness in other dimensions. Half the principals in this study left the job in the same year I conducted the research with a third indicating they left due to overwhelming job demands. This research suggests school districts and local school boards consider how to mitigate the damaging effects of a job that is vital to student success but often too costly to the personal wellness of its employees.

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Chapter 1

The job of a U.S. public school principal is multifaceted. In a 2012 survey of school leadership challenges, 75% of principals described the job as “too complex” (MetLife, p. 5). One likely explanation for these responses is that in recent years, the role of the school principal has expanded substantially from managing operations of a school to managing responsibilities as an instructional leader (Brown, Finch, MacGregor, & Watson, 2012; Eckman, 2004; Harding, 2016; Luebke, 2014; Tirozzi, 2001). Principals are expected to be Chief Operations Officers of a sprawling educational enterprise with oversight for critical administrative functions such as managing the budget, personnel, and the facilities. A principal’s responsibilities can also include the execution of mundane tasks such as ensuring there is an adequate supply of toilet paper in the building and the light bulb inventory is up to date. Principals are responsible for the selection, training, and evaluation of all staff in their building, a workforce that includes more than teachers. Staff from various bargaining units such as paraprofessionals, custodial, and clerical must be recruited and evaluated and principals are responsible for making sure each group’s contractual demands are adhered to through scheduling, task assignments, and even benefits administration (Copland, 2001). Depending on the size of the school and the support staff available, principals may also create student schedules or select and implement curriculum materials, a responsibility that requires expert knowledge of multiple content areas. Additionally, principals are expected to schedule, attend, and supervise school events. In the past 30 years, job expectations that were once primarily limited to managerial tasks have evolved to where a host of new leadership functions have been added to an already challenging role. This has created an increasingly untenable situation in which for many leaders, “The work of the

principal is much more than any one leader can appropriately handle” (School Leaders Network, 2014, p. 13).

Since the school reform era of the 1980s, when a generalized focus on measuring school effectiveness shifted to the specifics of raising student achievement, it soon followed that attention needed to be paid to the leadership demands of public school principals and the training and preparation provided to school leaders (Murphy, 1988). Present-day principals are now expected to be visionary leaders who transform schools from mediocrity to greatness and provide instructional leadership by frequently observing and giving feedback to teachers on how to improve their practice (Brown et al., 2012; Eckman, 2004; Harding, 2016; Tirozzi, 2001). Included in the job are legislative and policy mandates for student achievement such as those associated with the federal initiatives ushered in by the No Child Left Behind Act ("No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. 101-110," 2002) and the Every Student Succeeds Act, ("Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. Pub.L. 114-95," 2015) along with expectations from community stakeholders that principals will build relationships and establish trust while providing exemplary customer service (Copland, 2001). Separate from selection, retention, and the evaluation of teachers and support staff, principals are also expected to provide professional development and mentoring opportunities designed to improve instruction and thus, student achievement (Howard & Mallory, 2008; Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005; Ledesma, 2013; Simon, 2015). In keeping with this role, principals serve as in-house researchers who collect and analyze data to assess instructional effectiveness.

Aside from the managerial and leadership demands expected of all school principals, there are additional responsibilities that fall outside of these categories. For example, often the principal is expected to be a counselor or mentor to students or staff in crisis (Copland, 2001).

Families often seek guidance from principals for problems that may or may not be occurring in school, such as family difficulties or changes in student behavior at home. Accountability for student discipline and safety are also expected of school principals, especially in a society where incidents of school violence can quickly become sensational media events (Copland, 2001). Horrific episodes such as the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado where 13 students were killed or Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut where 20 children were killed in 2012, and the most recent 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, where 17 lives were lost invariably make security concerns a top priority for building and district leaders. Although few principals have had the misfortune of dealing with nationally reported tragedies of this magnitude, principals regularly engage in crisis planning for extreme events such as tornado drills and school lockdown scenarios.

Due to the principal's strategic position at the nexus of educational policy and classroom practice, the list of expectations and responsibilities required of the principal has been constantly getting longer (Rousmaniere, 2013). The spillover effects of this expanded roster of high-stakes role responsibilities are discernable across a range of personal and professional spheres. One area likely to be impacted is principal recruitment and retention. On average, about 20% of U.S. public school principals leave their positions each year (Fuller, Terry Orr, & Young, 2008; Miller, 2013). While some turnover is expected, significant changes in the principal's role create occupational conditions associated with detrimental effects on personal health and wellness. These adverse outcomes are known to aggravate principal churn, a phenomenon that results in lower rates of principal retention and decreased student achievement (Harding, 2016; Luebke, 2014; Peterson, 2001).

The Problem of Wellness: An Underappreciated Facet of Principal Retention and Effectiveness

Faced with multiple pressures and responsibilities, principals are especially vulnerable to stress and possible burnout. Burnout occurs when stress or strain, which are characteristic of all professions, are not mediated with appropriate support or buffers. Burnout happens more frequently in occupations that require meeting the needs of others, of which school building leadership is a prime example (Friedman, 2002). Burnout also represents negative job induced symptoms that can manifest themselves physically, emotionally, or cognitively (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). Administrators left with little time or energy to devote to the maintenance of personal well-being and life-balance are at risk of becoming burnout statistics themselves. Several studies have attempted to predict or identify antecedents to burnout in school principals (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004; Friedman, 2002; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). Many of the stressors that school administrators routinely experience have been identified in multiple models. These stressors include lack of support, inadequate resources, occupational demands versus time to accomplish them, organizational structure, and personal or professional isolation (Bakker et al., 2004). Another aggravating factor for burnout occurs when principals lack efficacy and begin to doubt their own leadership abilities (Friedman, 2002).

Principal wellness is a critical factor in leadership effectiveness and school success. Those who leave the profession or experience burnout may not have anticipated the stress that accompanies the job of school principal. Alternately, they may have failed to adequately plan for how they will manage their stress or its consequences once they assume the role. Fifty to 75% of school leaders believe building leadership is the most stressful job in education (Queen & Queen, 2004). The myth of the “superprincipal” has created unreasonably high expectations that make it difficult for principals to feel a satisfactory degree of efficacy in managing

professional and personal obligations (Eckman, 2004, p. 4). In fact, a growing principal shortage has been associated with the prevalence of these stress factors (Copland, 2001; Simon, 2015). Stress factors that go unrecognized or unaddressed can heighten the frequency of principal turnover or prompt principals to exit the profession at the first signs of burnout (Howley et al., 2005; Simon, 2015).

Cumulative job-related stress may be a contributing factor in the shortage because qualified principal candidates are increasingly indicating a lack of interest in the job. Compared to previous years when role complexity was arguably at a more manageable level, there is a diminished number of candidates applying for these once coveted principal positions (Copland, 2001; Howley et al., 2005; Simon, 2015). Teachers, from whose ranks prospective new principals are customarily identified, recruited, and trained, report being aware of the frustrations and difficulties that principals endure. They recognize the stressors associated with the job and a perceived lack of vital supports provided to principals may weigh heavier on their career decisions than increases in salary, status, or power. Studies from several different states have indicated that as much as 80% of teachers with administrative certification express no interest whatsoever in seeking a principalship (Howley et al., 2005).

Building principals are susceptible to the detrimental effects of workplace stress much like other adults employed in non-school worksites and various factors can negatively affect a high school principal's wellness. Due to the long hours supervising school events in a full calendar, administrators do not often have time for healthy meal planning. They frequently consume fast food between meetings and events or eat from school vending machines or concession stands. In addition to poor nutrition, other examples of health risks faced by building principals are a lack of physical activity, obesity, depression, or high levels of stress (Eaton,

Marx, & Bowie, 2007). Opportunities for exercise or movement--other than walking through the building--are insufficient (Beisser, Peters, & Thacker, 2014). High levels of stress and depression can put a strain on personal relationships. Principals at the high school level are prone to marital problems, and female administrators are more likely than males to be divorced due to an imbalance in their work and home lives (Gupton, 2010).

Administrators may also carry out their day-to-day functions without adequate social support and as a result, experience “profound isolation on the job” (School Leaders Network, 2014, p. 12). Continuously adding to the expectations and responsibilities of building principals without removing a commensurate amount of prior obligations or demands is a recipe for increased anxiety, frustration, and stress (Beisser et al., 2014). The job demands of high school principals are so high that their wellness should be no less important than that of students or staff. Each principal will handle their job demands differently and each principal will have varying perceptions of areas of their life they believe are managed well or not. The job of a high school principal is fulfilling in some aspects of wellness but draining in others. But all in all, when it comes to wellness, building principals are largely overlooked.

The extant literature on wellness programs in schools tends to focus on the promotion of student wellness, not that of building administrators. The studies that address the problem of health promotion in schools mainly examine how staff can model healthy behavior for students (Allegrante, 1998; Allensworth & Kolbe, 1987). When principals are referenced in the literature on health promotion in schools, it is mainly as a side note, that is, as a component of a successful student health promotion program in which strong leadership is a requisite factor (Beisser et al., 2014). With multiple job responsibilities and little to no attention devoted to wellness, school districts cannot continue to ignore the problem of administrator wellness. School districts should

expect their building principals to model wellness as much as they are expected to model instructional leadership or any other educational best practice. Yet, current models for the mentorship and retention of school leaders do not indicate an expectation for preventing burnout or promoting wellness. This is a serious oversight because districts invest heavily in principals and are strongly motivated to retain them as valuable human resources who are not easily or inexpensively replaced (School Leaders Network, 2014). Betiello, Kalogrides, and Loeb et al. (2012) found that schools that experience principal turnover often suffer from a lack of stability and higher teacher turnover, which in turn has a cascading negative effect on student achievement. The detrimental effects of frequent principal turnover are more pronounced in schools with high poverty and low achievement. Even more troubling for those schools is the inability to attract experienced replacements when principals leave.

However, despite the numerous drawbacks associated with the rigorous demands and expectations placed on building principals, a significant portion of high school principals across the country persevere in leading their schools and striving for their best professional selves, albeit with varying degrees of success. Many of them find value and satisfaction in serving others and making a difference for students, a range of intrinsic occupational rewards and fulfillment that seemingly outweighs whatever external sources of exhaustion and stress they have to endure (Howard & Mallory, 2008; Howley et al., 2005; Ledesma, 2013; Simon, 2015). Apparently, these principals find ways to successfully manage their workloads and avoid the toxic stress and burnout that otherwise deter prospective candidates from applying, drive many current principals to leave education altogether, or assume different leadership positions in the district.

The reasons how and why some principals can maintain their wellness is not well understood. There may be personal explanations for how current principals avoid getting overwhelmed by stress and alternatively, there may be organizational or environmental reasons that explain their longevity. Considering the importance of the building principal in fulfilling managerial and instructional leadership roles, research into this problem is critical. The insights gained from analyzing the perspectives of both past and current high school principals can provide insights that inform districts and educators about how to mitigate the conflict between stress and wellness. It is a reasonable proposition to suggest that relatively tenacious principals engage in practices that effectively manage their own wellness and the identification and analysis of these practices are the central concern of this research study. By applying Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness as my theoretical framework, I hope to identify which dimensions of wellness principals feel are nurtured or neglected while they fulfill their duties as high school administrators.

Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness

To gain an understanding of how high school principals view their current wellness, I used Hettler's (1984) Six Dimensions of Wellness to examine the perceptions each principal has about his or her wellness. Although the ideas about wellness have been researched and written about since the 1950's, few educational institutions have taken an active role in observing, measuring, or ensuring the wellness of their stakeholders. When Dunn (1959) coined the term "wellness," he made a careful distinction between the constructs of "health" and "wellness." He identified health as freedom from disease or illness and a state that is static or unchanging. In contrast, Dunn observed that wellness is "dynamic-a condition of change in which the individual moves forward, climbing toward a higher potential of functioning" (p. 447). Wellness is a

measure of how people adapt and modify their behaviors and lifestyle choices to function highly in varying and changing environments. The goal in high-level wellness is to maximize an individual's potential to their greatest capacity (Dunn, 1973). According to this theory, there is no final state of wellness but rather a constant progression toward our best selves. An individual can either make progress forward or backward but it is not possible to remain developmentally static (Dunn, 1959) .

Hettler based his concept of wellness on Dunn's (1959) pioneering work. In addition, the National Wellness Institute (NWI), an accrediting body for undergraduate wellness and health promotion programs that certifies professional wellness practitioners, adopted Hettler's definition as its standard of practice. Importantly, Hettler characterized wellness as active or ongoing. A person's individual drive and motivation will influence their perception of themselves as functioning highly or not in any given situation. Expanding on Dunn's pioneering explanation, Hettler (1984) described wellness as "an active process through which individuals become aware of and make choices toward a more successful existence" (p. 13). The idea of successful existence is a subjective one because wellness is individually perceived by every individual based on their personality and situation (Harding, 2016). Hettler (1984) conceptualized wellness as comprising six interacting dimensions. This holistic approach views human activity and progress as synergistic in that it encompasses measures of intellectual, emotional, physical, social, occupational, and spiritual domains of a person's wellness.

Intellectual Wellness

According to Hettler, intellectual wellness is the degree to which one is mentally stimulated or engaged. A person who is intellectually well is able to access resources to improve or enhance a skill set or to increase their potential for sharing information with others (Hettler,

1980). While many other fields of work receive continuing professional development or training, most school principals are not supported with ongoing development once they are on the job (School Leaders Network, 2014). Depending on the years of experience or time spent in a role, a principal might feel overwhelmed and underprepared, challenged and stimulated, or bored and stagnant. Conversely, principals who receive regular professional development are more likely to feel informed and well prepared for the complexity of the work.

Emotional Wellness

Emotional wellness is characterized by a person who has a positive outlook and can accurately assess and manage his or her feelings and related behaviors. He or she would have a strong sense of self-esteem or self-determination (Hettler, 1980). Whitaker concurred when he stated, “the difference between average and great principals lies in what they expect of themselves” (T. Whitaker, 2011, p. 17). Additionally, a principal might have a hard time staying connected to his or her own emotions if the culture of expectations for a school leader is to always project a sunny outlook yet has no outlet to vent or be vulnerable when he or she needs support.

Physical Wellness

Physical wellness is the degree to which one chooses lifestyle behaviors such as exercise and nutrition that prevent illness or disease. Hettler’s definition also measured “the degree to which one maintains cardiovascular flexibility and strength” (1980, p. 78). A common requirement of a high school principal is to work extended hours each week with a highly variable schedule, which may or may not allow opportunities for physical activity or healthy meal planning. On the other hand, most high school buildings have gym facilities and equipment

available on site, which may provide administrators with ease of access to physical exercise during a break between job responsibilities.

Social Wellness

Hettler defined social wellness as how much one contributes to the community or their family. Social wellness also incorporates how effectively or extensively individuals build social networks or interact with their environment and living spaces ("The Six Dimensions of Wellness," 2016). Many building principals see themselves as servant leaders and consider the work they do as a service to the community. However, the demands of the job and the isolation of the role might limit their ability to build satisfying social relationships outside of work. Much of the work of a school principal is relationship intensive. Administrators must work with and through stakeholders to influence others (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). Engaging in a social support system is important to managing stress at work. A principal needs people with whom he or she can share problems and explore solutions or engage in social activities (Queen & Queen, 2004). These support networks are not always readily available within a principal's school building.

Occupational Wellness

Occupational wellness is a measure of the satisfaction one derives from work but also the balance between work and play ("The Six Dimensions of Wellness," 2016). The pull of extensive managerial obligations such as student activities, facilities management, and student behavior prevents principals from what they may believe is the more meaningful work of improving instruction through program development or professional development for teachers (Clark & Clark, 2002). Additionally, there are often policy demands that prevent principals from exercising autonomy in decisions about personnel hiring and firing, curriculum selection or

implementation, or budgeting and allocation flexibility (School Leaders Network, 2014).

Principals who do not have a gratifying balance of time for themselves outside of work or who do not feel empowered and autonomous may not identify themselves as having a high level of occupational wellness.

Spiritual Wellness

Spiritual wellness is a measure of how well a person is connected to their values and belief systems and finds meaning and purpose in life ("The Six Dimensions of Wellness," 2016). According to Murphy (2002), school principals are moral stewards and "people who want to affect society as school leaders must be directed by a powerful portfolio of beliefs and values" (p. 75). Much of the work of a principal requires making decisions or value judgments about the right thing to do in the face of more than one desirable choice. Other times, a principal might have to choose the least harmful approach from more than one unattractive alternative (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). Further, principals experience conflict when determining how to allocate time, energy, and other resources to problem solving. Principals believe they should serve their students and their top priority is academic achievement and the well-being of their students. However, there are times they must also serve teachers, parents, school boards, and the public. Often those stakeholders have contradictory expectations (Ripley, 1997).

If a high school principal perceives that providing high quality learning for their students and supervising teachers and other staff is part of an effort to maintain excellent teaching, he or she may believe their work is purposeful. However, if a principal feels thwarted or deprived of his or her avocational purpose in life due to a high-demand job, he or she may not have a strong sense of spiritual wellness. Dunn (1973) concluded that the way principals used their beliefs to make decisions determined whether they were functioning highly. If a principal makes decisions

that are aligned with their core values and purpose, then integrity and confidence will contribute to spiritual wellness.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of high school principals through the lens of Hettler's six dimensions of wellness. Hettler's theoretical framework articulates several interrelated avenues that served as useful guides for exploring the construct of wellness. In this study, I investigated how high school principals contextualized the various dimensions of their organizational roles within a framework of wellness, and how they attended to this interconnected set of responsibilities. I sought to understand what aspects of the job of a high school principal contributed to the nurture or neglect of professional wellness and to each principal's perception of individual wellness overall.

The central questions this study addressed were:

- 1) How do high school principals characterize the fundamental responsibilities of their job?
- 2) How do high school principals describe their current state of wellness?
- 3) How do high school principals see the responsibilities of the job as contributing or detracting from their efforts at maintaining wellness?
- 4) How do high school principals maintain their wellness in the face of a demanding and time-consuming job?

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This literature review introduces information from prior studies organized around the six dimensions of wellness. Though not all the studies cited in the literature address Hettler or his pioneering work on wellness, his wellness model is used as a structure to organize the information in the literature review. Included are perceptions of principals and their families, principal feelings of isolation, gender differences among principals, and principal longevity. Additionally, literature is included that discusses the increased demands of the job as well as the factors that contribute to burnout. As the literature illustrates, one dimension of wellness often influences another. When the principal is satisfied, confident, positive, and develops good relationships, they will be more effective in leading their school and less likely to leave the profession prematurely.

Intellectual Wellness

Intellectual wellness is the degree to which a person is stimulated, challenged, or engaged mentally. For some principals, the mundane managerial demands of the position of high school principal detract from the more rewarding and challenging tasks of instructional leadership. This was the finding of Friedman's 2002 study on burnout in which principals reported feeling bogged down and disappointed with the "petty tasks" (p. 232) they were saddled with.

Another source of dissatisfaction or burnout among high school principals is a lack of autonomy to make decisions and a lack of understanding of district level mandates. For example, the principals in Whitaker's study (1996) experienced a great deal of anxiety and lack of efficacy when they were denied the opportunity to make decisions independently or collaboratively as they saw fit. These feelings were heightened by the uncertainties they had to

cope with about occasionally ambiguous or contradictory expectations from district level administrators.

Dussault and Thibodeau (1996) studied isolation at work and found that professional isolation and lack of ability to network and engage in professional development among other principals contributed to principals feeling less effective and to poor performance overall. Although these three studies were conducted several years ago, similar problems persist today and are no closer to being resolved. Although Friedman studied principals in Israel and Dussault's study participants were in Quebec, the findings suggests that burnout, isolation, and principal workload are universal and not limited to American high school principals.

Emotional Wellness

In general, a person with strong emotional wellness is in control of his or her emotions and has a positive outlook or strong sense of efficacy. The high school principals in Howard and Mallory's (2008) study about isolation cited long hours, health concerns, and accountability as major contributors to their feelings of isolation from family, peers, and social connections. Their feelings of isolation had the potential to lead to burnout. End of career principals reported being eager for retirement and ironically, other principals stated feeling responsible for solving everyone's problems although they had no support to deal with their own problems. A culture of job expectations was cited as a major influence on the isolation experienced by participants. Elements of their personal lives that suffered and contributed to isolation were time for health and relaxation activities, time with friends, relationships at home, and lack of relationships with colleagues.

The Howard and Mallory (2008) study interviewed 10 high school principals and those principals were asked to describe their perceptions about the effects of the job on their feelings of

isolation. Participants in the Howard and Mallory (2008) study were evenly split by gender and included a variety of ages and marital status. All the participants were currently serving as high school principals and none had been in place more than 14 years. Further, this study focuses strictly on isolation, which has a negative connotation. I anticipate that some of my participants might describe feeling isolated, but my study also leaves open the possibility that participants will be managing their emotional wellness capably or that they do not perceive their emotional wellness to be suffering.

Physical Wellness

Physical wellness refers to one's lifestyle decisions that promote physical health and prevent illness. Stress can be clinically defined as "the sum of the biological reactions to any adverse stimuli, mental or emotional, internal or external that tends to disturb the organism's balance of homeostasis" (Queen & Queen, 2004, p. 6). Chronic stress can affect one's physical health with consequences such as difficulty sleeping, irritability, cardiovascular distress, respiratory problems, fatigue, malaise, depression, bowel or digestive disorders, and musculoskeletal injuries such as back or neck pain.

School employees who engage in physical activity regularly say they feel less stress and have more ability to cope with their stress. This is because physical activity builds resilience to stress and helps prevent future stress episodes. There is also often a relationship to workplace stress and poor nutrition because people who consume foods high in sugar and fat are associated with having higher levels of perceived stress (Gillan et al., 2013).

In their study of school staff health risks and their effects on productivity, Alker et. al (2015) screened secondary school staff in Massachusetts for obesity, smoking, and depressive symptoms. The study looked at productivity in terms of absenteeism, or days of work missed

due to health and presenteeism, defined as loss of productivity due to poor health while on the job. The study found that a higher Body Mass Index (BMI), higher depression scores, and current smoking behaviors were associated with higher productivity loss due to both presenteeism and absenteeism. Of note was the difference smoking status had on absenteeism relative to job type. All jobs except teachers had greater associations with smoking and missed work (Alker et al., 2015).

According to their literature review, health behaviors and risks can influence student health behavior and by extension, healthy employees can have a positive influence on student learning. Decreased productivity is a concern for school districts as it can lead to lower job satisfaction and morale, which can contribute to job turnover and career change (Alker et al., 2015). Participants were not limited to any specific type of school employee. Participants included clerical, custodial, administrator, counselors, teacher aides, nurses, and cafeteria workers, along with teachers. However, the findings and implications as to cost effectiveness of good health and the negative consequences of poor performance are certainly applicable to my study of high school principals.

A study done by Blair, Collingwood, Reynolds, Smith, Hagan, and Sterling (1984) found that employees in a large metropolitan school district experienced improved health by losing weight, lowering their blood pressure, and raising their overall sense of well-being by participating in an onsite health promotion program. Compared to the previous year, the school district benefitted by enjoying a cost savings through reduced absenteeism during the year the health promotion took place. Approximately 2,600 employees participated in a full pre-test, intervention, and post-test cycle. The pretesting included physical examination by a doctor, a psychological screener for well-being, job satisfaction, and self-concept, and a health habits

questionnaire that asked about exercise, smoking, and diet. By the end of the study, 11% of participants had quit smoking and 26% of participants who self-reported as sedentary at the beginning of the study had begun exercising regularly. The study also reported positive effects on employee well-being. The purpose of this study was to identify a reduction in absenteeism, so it was definitely tailored to the employer cost savings perspective. The findings support what other studies in this literature review have found: healthy employees are happier and more productive.

If a principal does not address chronic stress, he or she could be vulnerable to burnout, which is a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion resulting from an inability to cope with the daily stresses of leadership over time (Queen & Queen, 2004). A principal's negative feelings of stress or fatigue can also trickle down and have an undesirable effect on the rest of the school. Lifestyle and behavior choices such as smoking, obesity, poor nutrition, alcohol or drug abuse, and a sedentary lifestyle contribute to about half of all deaths in the United States (Queen & Queen, 2004). This is important to school principals because the heavy time demand of the job often contributes to poor diet and exercise choices by school administrators. They simply do not have time to eat right and exercise. One of every two school leaders is obese, one of every six has high blood pressure, and one in 10 has a substance abuse problem (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). Hettler's (1980) tongue in cheek observation exemplifies how important it is for principals to attend to their physical wellness: "One sure sign of effectiveness on the job is for the individual to remain alive" (p. 81).

Beisser, Peters, and Thacker (2014) used the knowing-doing gap as the theoretical framework for their study on secondary principal wellness. The framework theorizes that leaders know about best practice as it applies to health and wellness but may not be able to apply it to

their own actions. The study found a disparity between the responsibility of principals to create a healthy school environment for students and the actual wellness routines practiced by principals. This quantitative study used Hettler's six dimensions of wellness to construct survey questions and asked participants to answer questions relating to work-life balance, nutrition, and health. Participants also had the opportunity to provide open-ended narrative responses. Principals reported their jobs were stressful but also gratifying and purposeful and while they acknowledged struggling with work-life balance, they would not seek an alternative career path if given the option.

In applying the knowing-doing gap to the participants understanding of wellness, the study identified that principals felt their beliefs and actions were misaligned (Beisser et al., 2014). The job prevented them from modeling behavior in the way they knew would help them lead best. For example, one principal rated his responsibility to model a healthy lifestyle as 10 out of 10, but his actual modeling at five. This study found a correlation between the widest gaps in knowing and doing and the level of stress that principals self-reported. Principals who described themselves as often stressed rated the difference between their responsibility to model a healthy lifestyle and their actual modeling as a 2.45-point difference on a 1-10 scale, while principals who described themselves as seldom stressed had a 1.8-point gap between responsibility and actual modeling.

This mixed methods study focused a great deal on measuring the knowing-doing gap and the influence principals perceived they should have on promoting health and wellness to their students and staff. Since it was mixed-methods, there were also some anecdotal responses reported that supported the barriers to healthy choices and the demanding nature of the work of secondary school principals. Because these data were collected at the end of the school year

when schedules were especially hectic, all the data were collected online and anonymously. There were no face-to-face interviews, which might have provided an opportunity for different, if not more detailed, data.

Social Wellness

According to Hettler, social wellness refers to the connection or contribution one makes to his or her community. This includes relationships and support networks. In 2005, Dierksen conducted a quantitative study of Kansas principals and their perceptions of wellness. While Dierksen used six dimensions of wellness, they were not the same as Hettler's six, nor did he define each dimension in the same way. Dierksen used a definition for emotional wellness that more closely matches the social dimension used in this study. That is, what Dierksen considers emotional wellness applies more to social wellness using the Hettler model (Dierksen & Turk, 2005). Dierksen used a survey instrument to capture and quantify principal's self-reported perceptions of wellness. His study found that females perceived themselves higher in relationships and the literature he used supported the notion that females were better than males at using relational strengths to enhance their leadership capabilities.

Dierksen and Turk (2005) did not find any correlations between race, enrollment size, years in administration, or years in position and a principal's perceived wellness, though marital status correlated to a higher composite score for wellness. Age of principal and grade level of building did have significant correlations to principal wellness, either overall or specifically to the social aspects. Increased age among principals indicated a higher sense of values and purpose as well as a greater ability to maintain relationships. Secondary principals demonstrated a lower wellness score than their early grade counterparts, likely due to the greater number of roles and responsibilities expected of secondary school principals.

Initially, I was concerned that my study would be too much like Dierksen and Turk's (2005) study as both focus on assessing the wellness of school principals. However, there are substantial differences between this study and my own. Dierksen used a random sample of 310 K-12 principals in Kansas and administered a survey with quantitative measures. My study addressed a specific population of high school principals and I used qualitative face-to-face data gathering of a much smaller sample. Dierksen also used a multidimensional model of wellness that is similar but not identical to Hettler. Dierksen's model included a psychological dimension that is not addressed in Hettler's model, and Hettler includes an occupational wellness dimension that Dierksen did not utilize.

Isolation and burnout among 192 first-and second-year principals was the focus of a study conducted by Stephenson and Bauer in 2010. The aim of the study was to reduce early turnover by finding ways to support new principals. Their study utilized a treatment and a comparison group to identify if a structured coaching program with a mentor, feedback on teacher walkthroughs, and regular meetings with other new principals in the treatment group would have an influence on their self-reported feelings of symptoms of burnout. The study yielded findings that were consistent with expectations as well as some that were not. As expected, social support lessened isolation and principals who experienced higher levels of role stress experienced greater isolation. What was not expected was the treatment group, which enjoyed a coaching relationship, actually experienced a greater degree of isolation. It seems the coaching experience contributed to work overload and took principals further away from a source of support--working with teachers and students (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010).

Occupational Wellness

Occupational wellness indicates job satisfaction as well as achieving or maintaining a work /life balance that is appropriate to each person. According to Eckman (2004), “role conflict” (p. 368) is what can happen to principals as they try to balance family or personal roles with professional roles. When a principal experiences role conflict, they can suffer from anxiety, impaired decision-making, lack of confidence, and a general decline in performance. Prolonged exposure to the negative feelings created by role conflict can lead to an “exhaustion threshold” (Queen & Queen, 2004, p. 5). When principals experience high levels of role conflict, job satisfaction declines (Eckman, 2004). Principals who attempted to find a balance between work and life often experienced “priority guilt” (p.16), which can be characterized as being so preoccupied with work tasks that a principal is unable to enjoy recreation or leisure outside work (Queen & Queen, 2004). In addition, pocket technology such as a cell phone has broken the barrier between work and home life. Now that principals have 24-7 access to communication with and about work related issues, family time, sleep, and weekends away from their desk are all easily disrupted by a glance at their phone (Harding, 2016).

Bruckner (1998) interviewed spouses and family members of married school principals to gain their perspectives on how job demands affected their families. Family members cited after-hours demands and stress on the job as two factors that spouses gave as reasons for their concerns about the health and well-being of their principal partners. Within the family structure, many husbands and wives noted their principal spouses had different personalities at work than at home. Because they had to be “on” and presenting a public persona at work, sometimes a principal’s stress and frustration was taken out on family members. As one wife said, “He’s short with us. The public gets his best side” (p. 25). Another domestic concern expressed by

spouses was the lack of support in child rearing duties at home. Partners of principals mentioned they were limited in their career pursuits as they had to take on more family responsibilities to make up for their absent spouse. A principal's husband said, "I am a single parent with little time to be a husband" (p. 24). Not only did their relationships often suffer, spouses reported feeling lonely, sad, or angry because their principal partners made them feel less important than their job. Conversely, 84% of respondents said they liked being married to a school principal and 81% of principal's children reported liking having a principal as a parent. More than 40% of the principals' children said they spent more time with their parents at games and activities than their peers with non-principal parents.

Spiritual Wellness

Spiritual wellness has less to do with religion than the connection one feels with their core values. Luebke (2014) studied principals who stayed in their jobs and the reasons for their longevity. Her descriptive narrative described the experiences of 10 male, suburban high school principals who served in the same building for 10 years or more. The principals spoke of the challenges of loneliness, long hours, and trying to find an appropriate work-life balance. The factors that contributed to their willingness to stay were both institutional and personal. Principals considered their relationships with the faculty, central office, school board, parents, community, and students to be rewarding. These supportive relationships contributed to their feelings of efficacy and job satisfaction. Other institutional factors that contributed to their decisions to remain in their positions were collaboration, trust, and autonomy granted to their administrative role.

Another factor affecting longevity in Luebke's (2014) study was how closely the culture and priorities of the school district matched up with the skills, talents, and interests of the

principals. Part of this fit included being a part of the community and feeling like it was home. Another aspect of fit was compensation. All the principals felt fairly compensated for their work and none listed compensation as a valid reason for leaving their current positions. Overall, the principals cited several factors aligned with Hettler's (1983) six dimensions of wellness that allowed them to maintain job satisfaction and remain in their positions for longer than the usual length of tenure in their buildings. In contrast to Howard and Mallory's (2008) study on isolation, which focused on the negative aspects of the job, Luebke was able to talk with principals who presumably figured out how to reconcile the occupational challenges with the rewards. Principals who served their communities while answering a spiritual calling tended to find contentment in their positions.

Antecedents and Antidotes to Burnout

Hettler's six dimensions were not designed for the context of school administration and therefore do not address or encompass all aspects of stress, satisfaction, or the general wellness of those who run America's educational institutions. While most of the literature can be examined for similarities to Hettler's dimensions, his work does not address specific symptoms and causes of burnout. For example, the principals in Howard and Mallory's (2008) study estimated their work load to comprise between 60-70 hours per week and Lavigne, Shakman, Zweig, & Greller (2016) found that high school principals spent between 3-5 more hours per week at work than elementary or middle-school principals. A critical role of the principal was buffering and filtering distractions so teachers and staff could focus on the work of student learning (Peterson, 2001). Principals experienced a great deal of pressure because school leaders were expected to move many staff members toward the common goal of student learning and achievement (Ledesma, 2013; School Leaders Network, 2014). Several researchers have

examined the relationship between high achieving schools and strong leadership (Clark & Clark, 2002; Murphy, 1988; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The School Leaders Network indicated in a 2014 report that, “Not a single school has ever been found to accomplish turnaround achievement without a powerful leader at the helm of the change effort” (p. 5). In other words, the success of a school, whether a school in need of reform or one that is already successful, rests chiefly on the shoulders of the principal (Beisser et al., 2014). This culture of expectations creates an enormous amount of pressure on principals to perform.

In industries outside education, managers and executives report the greatest barrier to not being able to perform at the highest level is “having too much to do and not enough time to do it” (Merrill et al., 2012, p. 294). Employees who experience mood disorders, anxiety, or depression are five times more likely to experience interference with their work. The irony and the struggle for many school administrators is finding time to engage in healthy behaviors and lifestyle choices. According to Gupton (2010), a school principal typically works 60 hours or more each week and faces frequent interruptions to the average 149 tasks they must complete each day. The job of a school administrator is physically, intellectually, and emotionally demanding, but does not leave much time for self-care.

Friedman (2002) found that burnout is most likely to occur when principals are unable to fulfill any of the multiple demands satisfactorily, which undermines their self-efficacy and contributes to increased stress levels. Another cause of stress that could lead to burnout is when the demands of the job do not include the autonomy to make decisions. Poor relationships with teachers, overload of demands vs. time, and lack of support caused by isolation are major stressors that principals experience that can lead to burnout.

Maintaining a Healthy Work-Life Balance

Several studies recommend ways that district leaders can help principals achieve or maintain a healthier balance for themselves and their families. Most often, principals cited peer mentoring and networking as critical to supporting them in a non-evaluative way (Beisser et al., 2014; Harding, 2016; School Leaders Network, 2014). Learning from peers was reported by principals as being the most effective method of support for achieving personal growth and providing relief from the social isolation felt at work (School Leaders Network, 2014).

If district leaders limited the length of meetings and shifted the locations of meetings closer to the principal's home turf, principals would not have to deal with a backlog of work that accumulates when they are away from campus (Harding, 2016). To lessen their work burdens, district leaders could empower principals to prioritize and delegate tasks for supervision that are not critical to the mission of student learning. Developing a culture of support and reasonable expectations would help principals set healthy boundaries between work and personal life and alleviate some of the guilt that principals feel when they make the decision to set work aside. Creating opportunities for school leaders to incorporate movement and healthy meal planning would also improve their physical well-being and potentially their productivity at work (Beisser et al., 2014)

Hettler (1980) observed that aside from physical health being a cost savings, addressing more than just the physical domain of wellness is important. Employees with a positive outlook, who can form and engage in positive human interactions and have high levels of energy are of greater value to employers. Organizations should strive to increase employee job satisfaction because workers who are satisfied perform better than those who are dissatisfied (Eckman, 2004). Investing time and money in keeping persons well is far more economically sound than

treating the consequences of poor lifestyle choices (Ardell, 1979). In a telling anecdote, Hardie (2015) recounted a statement one of Hettler's medical school professor's reportedly said: "If you [as physicians] teach people how to live in the first place, a lot of these diseases we are being taught to treat would never happen" (p. 2). In this vein, this study hopes to make an important contribution to the understudied problem of high school principal wellness by examining how the occupational environment of high school principals nurtures or neglects the wellness of these school leaders.

Chapter 3: Design and Methodology

Using Hettler's six dimensions of wellness as a theoretical framework, this qualitative study sought to describe the perceptions of 10 high school principals' wellness. In each dimension, I gathered information about the aspects of their jobs that were nurturing or fulfilling, as well as those areas where the principals experienced frustration or expressed early symptoms of burnout. Qualitative design seeks to describe or understand the experiences people share and the meanings they make of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Thematic analysis is a flexible tool to identify and report patterns or themes in the data. As I asked current high school principals to discuss their ideas about their own wellness, I used this method to examine the meanings, experiences, and perceived realities of my participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Study Sites and Participants

Financial and time constraints made it important to locate study participants who were readily accessible in terms of distance. I initially gathered information from county election data to identify 10 high school principals from schools of varying sizes in rural, urban, or suburban settings. I used this election data to visually identify districts in the greater Riverville (a pseudonym) area. Since there were over 20 school districts ranging in enrollment from 240-8,000 students and in those districts 27 high schools within an approximate 1-hour radius around Riverville, I was able to identify a sufficiently robust pool of participants relatively nearby. Although to some degree, contextual school differences may have influenced the discussion and analysis of participant perceptions of wellness, I believe the basic demands and experiences of being a high school principal are similar across settings. Because my aim was to neither avoid nor target high school principals working within a particular type or size of school, I deliberately employed maximum variation in selecting my participants by starting with districts nearest

Riverville and expanding outward until I obtained a suitably diverse sample. With no intention of generalizing from the sample to a population, my sample was not a matter of representativeness but information richness (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explain that a purposeful sample is not selected to find out what is true or generalizable to the whole but to tell the story or understand a particular sample in depth.

Once the Institutional Review Board at my university approved the study, I contacted the high school principals, provided information about the study, and requested their participation (Appendix A). Information for principals who had recently left the profession or retired was not available in state department of education records, so a network or chain sampling method was employed as well (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As I interviewed participants, I asked them to refer me to a colleague they knew who was no longer a practicing principal. Principals leave the profession for a variety of reasons. Some promote to higher levels of district administration, others retire, and some leave the profession of education entirely (School Leaders Network, 2014). I reasoned that former principals who had left for a variety of reasons would be in a position to contribute the greatest insights into whether wellness was a factor in their departure.

Data Collection

I anticipated that 7-10 participants would allow for a variety of perceptions whose natural complexity would serve as the basis for the rich, detailed descriptions I developed using the techniques of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ultimately, I was able to secure 10 participants, though no one who was recently retired was interested in participating in the study. I elected not to contact additional principals because I concluded I had reached the point of data saturation when I began to hear the same answers from my participants. Creating an interactive

relationship between participants and myself was the best way to learn from each other (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). For this reason, individual interviews were used so rapport could be established that contributed to a trusting relationship between myself and the study participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Furthermore, I used a semi-structured individual interview technique because it assumed respondents had a unique interpretation of their experiences of wellness both in school and out. This approach allowed me to follow certain threads of meaning in an open-ended manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

I conducted face-to-face interviews lasting as much as one hour to gain personal information from each principal about his or her family structure and career trajectory (Appendix B). Understanding the marital and family status of each participant helped build me to construct a holistic picture of each person's wellness challenges that spanned in-school and out-of-school factors. These factors included whether a principal was married, divorced, or never married and the ages and number of any children. I deemed this information important because of the possibility it could contribute to, or create stress on, the wellness perceptions for each principal. It was also useful to know if they were at or near the end of their career or if they aspired to promote to higher levels of administration because these factors could also challenge or strengthen their wellness as it related to job satisfaction.

Once personal or biographical data from the first interview was collected, I asked each principal to meet a second time for approximately 45-60 minutes and respond to protocol questions specific to their perceptions of wellness (Appendix C). Two interviews conducted within a short interval of time helped establish a relationship of trust between the participants and me (Schwandt et al., 2007). Marshall and Rossman (2011) are clear that, "The conduct of a study often depends exclusively on the relationships the researcher builds with participants" (p.

118). Building trust to achieve authentic responses was critical to this process and a conversation about the high and low points in each principal's wellness history generated reflection and insightful conversation. Both sets of individual interviews for each principal were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for recurrent themes as they related to wellness perceived by participants within the broad theoretical framework of Hettler's six dimensions.

Data Analysis

After transcribing interview recordings into written texts, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that a researcher must be fully familiar with the data before any sorting or coding can take place. Accordingly, it was necessary for me to repeatedly read and familiarize myself with the interview texts and any field notes I had taken in order to establish an appropriate level of data intimacy. I wrote down initial notes and ideas for coding prior to the beginning of the formal coding process. Much of the initial coding and organizing centered on Hettler's dimensions of wellness, which might have limited the depth of insight I could gain from the responses. Additionally, the responses tended to overlap more than one dimension, so I was unable to maintain a discreet categorization if I had limited the structure of organization only to the six dimensions. Hettler's framework was a useful beginning for gathering and categorizing my data but the data I collected was not entirely limited to the dimensions outlined by Hettler. Next, I developed initial codes to identify interesting and seemingly significant ideas in the data. According to Creswell (2013), coding is a part of analyzing and categorizing. It was during this phase that I paid special attention to each data item and identified items that appeared to be part of a repeated pattern or theme. Once I finished with the initial coding of items, I began to sort and combine the individual codes into broader themes. By using this constant comparative method and recursively comparing one piece of data to another, themes gradually took shape and

helped me make sense of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was at this point that I was able to begin to make broader connections to the consequences participants sometimes paid when their wellness was compromised. Creswell (2013) emphasizes the need for the researcher to continue to focus on the meaning “that participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or that writers express in the literature” (p. 186). On several occasions, I was tempted to predetermine my themes aligned to each dimension. I resisted, however, because I knew an objective sorting of data was important to allow ideas to emerge independent of anticipated findings. I also fought the urge to operate from the assumption that my participants were not well overall. Though they could name areas of struggle in their individual perceptions of wellness, not every principal experienced burnout and dissatisfaction in their job. As themes were refined, validated, and mapped, I was guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) suggestion of employing a process of “define and refine” (p. 92) for each theme prior to conducting and writing up a detailed analysis.

Research Quality

There are multiple techniques available to ensure the worth of a study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) devised a set of four criteria to determine the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Over time, these criteria have become a de facto standard for evaluating the validity and reliability of qualitative inquiry. In the sections that follow, I provide a brief description of these criteria along with my anticipation of the important role each would play in my study.

Credibility

The idea that my findings would be considered credible, or valid, was strengthened by engaging with my participants for a long period of time and for multiple interviews, a strategy

referred to as prolonged engagement (Erlandson, 1993). Once transcriptions were complete, I offered participants the opportunity to perform a member check. This process allowed participants to review transcripts and contribute clarifications, corrections, or additional insights. This also gave participants an opportunity to validate their contribution to the study (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), member checking is the best way to ensure that meanings have not been misinterpreted and to ensure that researcher bias is not influencing understanding. A third strategy I used to strengthen credibility was peer review. I asked a colleague to review the data, coding, and themes to ensure that the findings were grounded in the data and my analytical interpretations remained true to the data presented (Erlandson, 1993; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Transferability

Using a highly detailed and descriptive format to report the setting, participants, and findings contributed to the quality of the research while facilitating the ability of others to apply what I learned in the study to other settings (Schwandt et al., 2007; Silverman, 2013). For example, I was aware that gender, race, and professional setting might shape the experiences and influence the perceptions each participant had about his or her wellness. Because I did not want to limit the potential range of responses, I deliberately selected respondents whose school demographics were least likely to lead me to presume they faced greater or lesser leadership challenges. Therefore, including a purposeful sample with a reasonable number and variety of high school principals who possessed a wide range of demographic, professional, and personal characteristics contributed to the likelihood that findings would be applicable to other settings. Looking at wellness from all angles and from a variety of attributes allowed me to look for themes or ideas that emerged across all participant variables (Silverman, 2013).

Dependability

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argue that in qualitative research, replication is not the goal. The idea of future research finding the same results is not as important as the idea that future researchers will agree that “given the data collected, the results make sense” (p. 221). According to Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer (2012), dependability means there is an expectation of consistency of measurement. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) also report that if the findings are in line with the data, then the study is deemed dependable.

One way to ensure dependability is to maintain an audit trail. An audit trail is similar to a traveler’s log or diary to the extent that it shows how the researcher arrived at the data, findings, and conclusions and what decisions were made in the process of acquiring or identifying each (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The audit trail I kept throughout the study turned out to be important because it helped me better maintain an accurate record of how I collected my data, tracked my decisions throughout the process, and documented my evolving understanding of how to process and interpret the data (Lapan et al., 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Research Ethics

As is standard practice, I obtained approval from the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to entering the field to collect data. Each principal I invited to participate was contacted via email with information describing the purpose of the study and a request for their participation. After principals agreed to participate, I followed up to schedule the interviews at a convenient time and place. At the interview table, I reviewed the informed consent procedures and explained the voluntary nature of the study. Because I realized that discussing one’s perceptions of wellness could create discomfort for one or more participants, I took steps to

minimize this potential by reminding each participant they could refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Assurances of confidentiality and data security were included in the informed consent.

Since the researcher functions as the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research, I was legally and morally obligated to ensure each participant's confidentiality. This meant reporting the data so no piece of information could be connected or associated with a participant or their work site (Lapan et al., 2012). Because my data collection came from high school principals working in a small geographical region of the state, I took care to omit or adequately obscure details revealing a person's position or location. I did this by employing pseudonyms to mask the actual identities of schools, school districts, administrators, and personnel. Audio-recordings, as well as transcriptions of recordings, coded findings, notes, and drafts of the study were kept on a password protected device and backed up to a password protected secure online data server. Approaching this important study with an insistence on beneficence, that is, an intention to only contribute to good outcomes for participants and striving to avoid harm, was an ethical obligation as well as a reassurance to participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Although the perceived benefits of the study are likely to vary among participants, I nonetheless anticipated that each respondent would appreciate contributing to the greater understanding of administrator wellness among their peers.

Researcher Positionality

As a veteran secondary school administrator, I have faced my own challenges balancing work demands with life choices. I have been an assistant principal in a high school setting and a head principal in three different urban middle schools with varying levels of economic disadvantage and academic performance. Recently, I made a life altering decision after 15 years

as an administrator to step away from administration and return to the classroom. My motivation to change jobs was entirely driven by the imbalance of costs and rewards in my own life. Lack of support from my superiors, bureaucratic and policy obstacles, as well as the personal and social sacrifices required to meet the demands of the job eventually became too great for me to sustain. I eventually determined that the relentless stress and impending burnout were no longer worth the salary and status that accompanied the title of Building Principal.

The purpose of identifying and examining my position and potential bias was to heighten my awareness of the ways it could influence my selection, interpretation, or reporting of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Using what these authors describe as “epoche” (p. 199), I strove throughout the study to “remove, or at least become aware of, prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions” (p. 199) I may have tacitly possessed. Being awake to these potential influences ensured that my personal experiences were managed in such a manner that I viewed each participant’s experience as objectively as possible. Carefully selecting and piloting protocol questions to maintain a dispassionate approach to which wellness dimensions might be harmed or enhanced by a principal’s job demands and district structure was one strategy I used to control for the intrusion of any undue subjectivity. Additionally, I strategically engaged in my own story with participants during the interview process and kept a reflective journal in which I continually and critically reflected on myself as a researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out long ago that objectivity is threatened when questions are formed that might “bend the response” (p. 293) or when inquiry is pursued with a specific purpose or answer in mind.

Chapter 4: Findings

Principal perceptions of wellness were collected during two face to face interviews at each principal's building. I contacted high school principals in the Riverville metro area as well as a few surrounding smaller districts. Ultimately, 10 principals agreed to participate. Table 1 summarizes each participant (all names are pseudonyms) and a brief description of each principal and their unique circumstances:

**Table 1
Study Participants**

Name	Age	Gender	Marital status	Number of Children	Years as HS Principal	Student Enrollment	Plans for future
Nick Clay	42	Male	Married 14 years	2 (primary school age)	6	1300	12 more years until youngest is done with school
Brad Frazier	48	Male	Single, twice divorced	2 (college age)	7	600	Resigned, no plan
Travis Reeves	41	Male	Married 13 years	4 (primary school age)	9	525	Promoted to district level
Rose Hammond	57	Female	Married 33 years	2 (adult)	2	180	Retiring
Darrell Franklin	52	Male	Married 7 years (wife #2)	2 (adult)	8	470	4-5 more years
Rod Weaver	49	Male	Married 26 years	3 (middle school/high school/college age)	1	1300	10 more years
Austin Black	44	Male	Married 21 years	2 (high school/college age)	9	850	No plan to change
Serena Babcock	50	Female	Married unknown	3 (college age and adult)	2	1050	No plan to change
Diana Ramsey	40	Female	Married 17 years	4 (elementary to high school age)	1	168	Promoted to district level
Chad Norton	54	Male	Married 31 years	3 (adult)	1	350	Resigned, plan not shared

Participant Vignettes

Nick Clay is a 42-year-old white male principal of a high school with 1300 students. Nick and his wife, who works full time as a nurse, have been married for 14 years and have two children in primary school. Nick's father-in-law also lives with Nick and his family. Nick is serving in his sixth year as principal and plans to work for 12 more years until his youngest child has finished school. Nick's school, Brown High School, has recently completed a bond issue project that created a new career academy facility attached to his building. This academy offers students from both high schools in the district an opportunity to pursue a career pathway and take classes that align with their strand.

Brad Frazier is a 48-year-old male who is twice divorced with two college-aged children who live in another state. Shortly before we met, Brad resigned his position at the suburban high school where he has served for seven years. At the time of our interview, Brad did not have a plan in place for employment once he finished his term at Magnolia High School. He has considered returning to graduate school to complete his district level licensure and has not ruled out pursuing a superintendent's position at some point in the future. When discussing his choice to resign, Brad said, "This has been a good place to work, but it was time to do something different." Brad's school is half the size of Nick's, with 600 students. Brad described his school as "somewhat a Shangri-La...our discipline [issues] are pretty slim."

Travis Reeves is also male, 43 years old, and married for 13 years. Travis and his wife have four small children, with the oldest only 10 years old. Travis' wife is a stay at home mom who embraces her role as Travis' primary support system in his career pursuits. Travis served the 550 students of Preston, a rural high school, for 9 years until receiving a promotion to a district level position for the upcoming school year. Many small or rural schools often choose to

pool their resources and join a special education cooperative. This model allows schools to have access to support staff and specialized curriculum, which is shared among multiple schools that would otherwise be cost prohibitive to sustain independent of the cooperative. Preston is different from the other rural and suburban schools in the study in that it does not belong to a special education cooperative. Instead, Preston serves all of its students' needs as a stand-alone special education district. According to Travis, this means that parents will "seek out our district for special education services because a student's education plan is very individualized and very strong."

Rose Hammond is a 57-year-old female who has been married for 33 years and worked in her rural school district for all the years of her marriage. Rose is an alumna of the small 180 student Gosnell High School where she taught for 30 years and has served as principal for 2 years. Rose has one son finishing college and another who will be finishing high school in the coming year. Rose is retiring at the end of the current school year because her mother has Alzheimer's disease and requires a significant amount of care. In addition, Rose's husband had a major health event this past school year and cannot work the farm full time as he used to. Rose would have been happy to continue working as the principal, but the time demands of the job took her away from the needs of her family and she chose to retire. Rose's school district completed a bond issue and construction on her new school lasted 2 years until it was ready for everyone to move in. At the time of the interview, the district had recently demolished the old building that was located only a few feet away from the new facility, which was a major stressor for her this past year.

Darrell Franklin is a 52-year-old male who is 7 years into his second marriage. He has two adult children and one grandchild. Wakefield Crest High School serves 470 students.

Darrell has been the principal in this bedroom community for 7 years and plans to retire in a few more years. Darrell explained his future outlook, “I’m very happy here. I enjoy what I do. Here in 4 or 5 years there might be some decisions to be made. Right now, I’m very satisfied with what I’m doing.” Darrell’s school is experiencing some demographic shifts as families from nearby Riverville choose to escape the city and live in Wakefield Crest while continuing to work in Riverville. The population fluctuates when aircraft companies in Riverville move away or downsize.

Rod Weaver is the principal of a large yet shrinking urban high school with just under 1300 students. Prior enrollment numbers were over 1600 but the aging population in the neighborhood near Riverville High means fewer residents have children of high school age. Rod is a 49-year-old male who has been married for 27 years and the youngest of his three children will graduate from his high school in the coming school year. Rod’s wife recently gave up her stay-at-home status to go back to school and in the coming year will begin her first year of teaching fourth grade. At the time of our interview, Rod had just completed his first year as a high school principal and planned to work for at least 10 more years before considering retirement. Rod was a teacher and a coach at his current high school 20 years ago and he and his wife are currently building their dream home.

Austin Black is in his ninth year as the principal of Pondview, a suburban high school serving 850 students. While none of the schools in my study is particularly racially diverse, Pondview has more socioeconomic diversity than nearby rural or suburban schools. Austin estimates the percentage of students at his school who receive free and reduced lunches is about 39%, which has caused his staff to change the way they provide services to their students. He is a 44-year-old male, married for 21 years, with one child in high school and one in college.

Austin does not aspire to promote to the district level and has no immediate plans to consider a career change.

Serena Babcock is a 50-year-old female principal of a suburban high school. Serena has been the principal to her 1,050 students for 2 years and has no thoughts about a career change any time soon. Serena has three adult children and her husband is a former football coach and now a corporate pilot who regularly travels for work. Serena has worked in her district for many years and served as a teacher, instructional coach, and principal of the alternative program before returning to Grayson High School first as an assistant principal and then as the head principal. Though independent, Serena's aging mother lives only a minute away and the family has decided it is best for her mother to be close to Serena.

Diana Ramsey is a first-year principal at Greenston High School, the smallest school in the study with 168 students. Greenston is also the least racially and socioeconomically diverse. The student population is 99% white with fewer than five students of color. Only 10% of Greenston's students received free or reduced lunch and the graduation rate is 100%. Greenston participated in a school redesign project with the state board of education that involved a lot of research and planning. Diana is a married 40-year-old mother of four children whose ages range from primary grades through high school. There are no assistant principals at any of the schools in the Greenston district. Diana will not be serving as principal for a second year because like Travis, she has been promoted to a district level position for the coming year.

The final participant in the study is Chad Norton, a 54-year-old male married for 33 years with two adult children. Chad is the third first-year principal in my study who, like Brad Frazier and Rose Hammond, has chosen to leave his position at his 350 student Belle Vista High School due to overwhelming job demands. Chad has worked in the Belle Vista community for 28 years

and was a PE teacher for 21 of those years. Prior to assuming the principalship at Belle Vista, he was an assistant principal, the principal at the intermediate school, and the assistant principal at the high school. “I bleed blue and white,” he drolly explained. “This is my high school and my dream job was to be the principal of my high school. I got that job and now a year later I’m walking away from it.” Chad will remain in his district and hometown but did not divulge the new position he will be taking for the coming school year. Chad’s wife is a third grade teacher in the district and his aging parents live only a few yards away from Chad’s home. Chad believes it is his responsibility to care for his parents.

In the following sections, I describe the findings and themes that emerged from the data. In an effort to maintain consistency with the literature review and theoretical framework, I have organized responses according to Hettler’s six dimensions of wellness. Though my participants were not familiar with the Hettler model, I constructed my interview questions to probe their perceptions of wellness in ways that would elicit answers that would correspond to each of the domains. Also discussed are ideas the principals had about the expectations held by themselves and their districts for their own wellness, as well as suggestions they had to make their jobs less stressful or demanding.

Physical Wellness

When asked to define wellness, the principals in my study frequently associated wellness with physical health and did not indicate much awareness of other domains of wellness. When prompted, some added mental, emotional, and even spiritual wellness to their considerations. Because they considered physical health a primary indicator of wellness, when asked what components of wellness were most troubling, most observed their physical health would benefit from improvement. Importantly, those who felt they were physically unwell attributed their lack

of wellness to the demands of the job. Four of my participants reported gaining weight in their first year as a high school principal and all but one gained as much as 30 pounds. They attributed their weight gain to not having time to engage in physical exercise and eating poorly.

Diana explained,

It was the schedule...going to all the events. Concession stand food is not healthy. It's so easy to grab a Snickers instead of making a healthier choice. There aren't many healthy choices you can make there. It's a lot easier to say, "Oh, I'll grab fast food and not pack a lunch" or eat a school lunch, which is not really the healthiest thing either.

Even the principals who were not in their first year and had not experienced dramatic weight gain reported not eating well. Rose and Chad both noted that because their daily schedules were unpredictable and often overbooked, they rarely had time for lunch and more often than not, would simply fast between breakfast and dinner.

Participants also believed poor sleep habits contributed to their feelings of ill health. Serena said, "There are times when I sleep great and times when I wake up in the middle of the night and my brain is running 100 miles an hour. Probably the worst part of my wellness is sleeping." Some participants attributed their caffeine and sugar consumption to poor sleep and low energy. Austin reported, "Sometimes you're just so physically exhausted you fall over no matter what, although my crutch is caffeine. I've got to find a way to get rid of the amount of caffeine I take in." Chad also confessed, "It was junk food, but you just felt like you needed a quick bit of energy, so you grab something and think, 'Okay, I'm energized.' You really weren't, but you felt more comfortable." Serena and Nick admitted to taking both over the counter and prescription sleep aids to help them on nights when they knew they would need to be rested the next day.

Emotional Wellness

For the principals in the study, family members and co-workers comprised key constituents of their support systems. Many principals built close relationships with their office staff, their assistant principals if they had them, athletic directors, and even with their superintendents or other supervisors.

Support Systems

No principal felt they lacked some level of emotional support somewhere in their lives, regardless of marital or family status. Several sought support outside of their familiar educational circle with longtime friends or associates who were not educators. For these participants, it was valuable and important to enjoy relaxation or recreation without having to talk about work. Even with family members, some participants resisted “venting” or talking about work at home. They made an effort to preserve family time and set work aside, so they did not have to constantly revisit work stressors. Nick reported his wife sometimes felt left out when he chose not to talk about work. “I don’t want to talk about this at home,” he explained. “I want to just be and put this away because I think about it too much anyway.” Travis, on the other hand, did confide in his wife. He mused, “I’ve talked about work a lot and probably divulged too much to her professionally, but she’s very trustworthy.” Often, participants consciously chose to associate with friends who were not in education so the temptation to “talk shop” would not arise.

Energy Sources

Though they had emotional support systems outside of and within work, a handful of participants described themselves as introverts. In general, these self-described introverts found their greatest source of energy and recharging in being alone. Sometimes due to sheer

exhaustion, this group of introverted principals reported having low energy and enthusiasm for many social activities. Instead of being socially “on” they explained, they preferred to just lie on a couch or watch television. Others would go alone to movies or pursue solitary activities such as hunting or reading, simply to escape human interaction. This need for quiet and solitude sometimes created a conflict for them as their spouses and children had expectations for spending family time together, especially when it involved their children’s sports and school activities. Serena shared, “I don’t even want to be around people. I don’t want to see people, I don’t want to talk to people. No. I want to be at home--by myself.” Principals with younger children reported that their spouses bore the bulk of the responsibility for managing the household chores and children’s schedules.

Providers of Emotional Support

The principals recognized they were a key person in the support systems their teachers and staff depended on. In some cases, they found this role fulfilling and energizing. Chad said he enjoyed coaching and mentoring staff and “offering suggestions for their classroom...those are fun to see.” For Rose however, providing emotional support for a staff member who was having a hard time required too much sacrifice on her part. Rose described experiencing emotional stress and distress due to serious health concerns of her mother and husband. Her stress level was exacerbated because her personal concerns occurred concurrently with a teacher in her building whose father was dying, a second teacher who was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, and a third teacher whose mother had recently passed away. As if this set of issues were not enough, a fourth teacher had back surgery while a fifth was struggling to adjust to civilian life after a long military deployment. Rose had to sacrifice and postpone nurturing her own emotional wellness and was unable to care for her family in order to attend to the wellness

of her teachers and the school population as a whole. As Rose explained the dynamic tensions she experienced in her school:

We had a lot of issues with our school this year that I felt I *had* to be the leader. I *had* to be the strong person. There's got to be someone who is the solid stone for all of our staff and students and at times, I was not there for my family when I needed to be there, my mom included. That's when I knew I had to make a change. It was very unbalanced. School was requiring so much more than I was able to give.

Rose enacted the choice that many principals expressed they would make if work became too much for them. They were quite clear that if work began to detract from their ability to be with their families, changes in their work environment would be required to place family needs first.

Spiritual Wellness

People tend to associate spiritual wellness with faith and religion. While relying on faith and religion may help guide principals in times of tribulation and celebration, in Hettler's wellness framework, spiritual wellness is about living in accord with your values and beliefs.

Core Values and Leadership

I found it interesting to hear the principals describe how differently they would handle a potential conflict arising from having to enforce a policy that contradicted their core values.

Some participants reported leaning on policy to avoid confrontation or conflict. Brad stated,

I do what I'm asked to do. I work for the district. Unless it's illegal or immoral, I'm going to do it. I'll express my opinion if I don't think it's the right thing to do but they're the boss.

Darrell explained it similarly: “It makes sense to just go with policy. It makes your life a lot easier. I used to try to bend policy to help kids, but it comes back to bite you. I learned you just stick to the policy.”

Other principals were less compliant. These more willful principals relied on their core beliefs and values to push back against and work to change policy they believed was wrong. Rod stated, “I have tremendous difficulty following orders when it conflicts with my own personal convictions. The short answer is that I often don’t follow the policy.” He provided an example of a young custodian who had attendance issues that put him in jeopardy of losing his job. Rather than follow the protocol and place the employee on probation, Rod had a coaching conversation with this employee about the importance of not missing more work. “This kid, he was working for peanuts. He was working two jobs trying to support himself and I’m supposed to... I’ll be honest, I didn’t have the disciplinary conference.” Austin also indicated he would rather negotiate than blindly follow a policy he disagreed with:

I have a high degree of rapport with my bosses, my community, my board, and my staff. This allows me the opportunity to look at a situation and say, “Okay, yes, the policy says this, but we need to rethink the policy and make some adjustments or adapt.”

He wondered why policies in effect for the past 15 years had not been updated to fit with the times or changing beliefs about education.

Regardless of whether a principal complies with policy or pushes back to align their moral compass, the stress of seeking a resolution can take a toll on the well-being of a principal. Diana cited an example of pressure she was under to create an additional sports team. She did the research, explored the financial consequences, and ultimately recommended against creating

the team. This decision caused a great deal of tension and unhappiness in her community, which was divided about the issue. Regardless of the outcome, the “fault” was going to lie with Diana.

Religion and Worship

Faith and belief systems can be a source of comfort or additional stress for principals. Rod left his church due to political conversations and his perception of a shift in ideology in the current political climate. His absence in church created stress and conflict within his immediate and extended family but he no longer finds solace and peace in his church community. He viewed his decision to no longer attend as an act of self-care. Diana also separated herself from her church community, explaining, “I would say this year we haven’t attended as much as we have in the past because of issues stemming from here. I did not want to go see people so we kind of stayed away.” This has been challenging because Diana feels a responsibility to ensure her children attend church regularly and are part of a church community.

In contrast, Nick valued his relationship with his faith and God so highly that he arranged for meditation and prayer in the middle of the night once a week. He set an alarm for 2:00 am each Tuesday, noting, “That is an hour for me to be with God. To just be quiet. Not a phone. No kids. I can sit and be still. It’s hard but it’s the best hour of my week.” Rose also prioritized her time for prayer and meditation. “I get up early in the morning and take time for myself,” she explained. “Twenty or 30 minutes just for me. That is my time to read the daily devotional, to read my scriptures and get ready mentally and physically for the day.” Both principals drew spiritual strength and clarity from taking time for themselves.

Purposeful Work

Every participant I interviewed reported finding meaning and purpose in their work when that work entailed helping students to succeed. This was the primary calling they saw

themselves fulfilling. Despite the many stressors they experienced, each principal felt a great deal of job satisfaction when they saw evidence their work with students contributed to their academic success. Serena summed up what every principal expressed in one way or another: “It’s a constant challenge for me to find out how I can help get them across the stage. I find the most meaning working with kids of all kinds to help them be successful beyond high school.” It is this rewarding experience of helping students that sustains each participant when the hours and the demands of the job begin to wear them down.

Occupational Wellness

For high school principals, occupational wellness is a challenge to maintain. There are many ways a principal can feel their work-life balance is out of sorts. One principal described an increase in professional demands as a “monkey on his back” when he changed from intermediate school to high school principal:

For myself, that monkey gets so big I can’t get it off my back. There are so many things that people need. There’s no time when the monkey isn’t continually jumping on my back and grabbing ahold of me and I feel like the monkey is weighing me down to where I’m crawling on my knees most of the time. At the intermediate center, I felt like I could walk and still have the monkey on my back.

The demand overload emerged as a universal concern for high school principals. In some cases, principals described a lack of support or understanding from their bosses about the time obligations they confronted every day. Sometimes, they received mixed messages from their bosses: “Take time for yourself this summer but, hey, we need you to come for this meeting,” said Nick.

Modeling Wellness for Staff

Principals reported they typically emphasized self-care and wellness to their staff but did not consistently model the behavior or expect it from themselves. They exhorted their teachers to stay home when they were sick but took little time off work themselves during the school year. “I think it’s the internal pressure you put on yourself,” said one. “I will show up sick but, yet I tell my staff first thing every year, ‘Your health comes first.’ Now, I won’t do it. I don’t take days off. I’m here.” A few participants expressed concerns about how others might perceive them if they missed events. More than once, they mentioned the idea of not wanting to appear weak. Diana shared how she struggled to project her professional identity: “I’ve got to prove myself to this entire community that I work hard. I will be at your kid’s event. I will be everywhere.” When her athletic director once attempted to send her home, she argued, “I’ve got to prove to people that I’m here. That’s the only reason. I worked hard to get here.” In some cases, this self-inflicted pressure to perform is costly to their time with their families. Nick estimated that he often works 80 hours per week and wished he had time to take his wife out to dinner or play with his children, even if it were only once a month.

This fear of how others perceive them can compound a principal’s stress. They often will not ask for help because they wish to quash perceptions of incompetence or inability. Brad explained, “We have a tendency not to show weakness, not to reach out a lot of times to other people because we don’t want to show that we can’t handle the job.” When asked how he dealt with fatigue or depression, Brad confessed that he routinely chose not to deal with it. “I don’t really do anything. I usually just stuff it, to be honest with you. I might share it with my assistant principal, but not very often. I usually just kind of stuff it and move on.” Even when he experienced anxiety, Travis was determined “not to get flustered or show anger or frustration

because teachers need to see their leaders as consistent, positive, and always moving forward.” In Travis’ mind, the need to keep up appearances was more important than his own outlet for emotional release.

Autonomy

Aside from the difficulty in managing their work-life balance, principals felt they compromised their occupational wellness whenever their autonomy as a leader was threatened. If they felt they were being overruled or micromanaged on a decision, they were frustrated by this lack of support from their supervisors. This tension was evident in the examples they cited where they felt trusted and empowered to make good decisions in contrast to other times when their superintendents stepped in to revise or invalidate a decision they made. As Travis transitioned to his new job as superintendent, he reflected on the unsatisfactory experiences he endured and how he wanted to be known as a superintendent who supported his principals:

I remember times when I made a recommendation and the boss would say, “Nah, you need to do this instead.” That happened on several occasions and it is a pet peeve of mine. I was a professional and went along with it but will try to avoid doing that myself. If there’s a recommendation from the principal, I want to be able to support that and be open to it, even though it may not be the direction I want to go. If they feel it’s the best for their building, then I want to trust them in that.

Travis was not the only principal who felt frustrated by feeling undermined by his supervisor. Chad also expressed frustration at the number of times his superiors thwarted his efforts to hold teachers accountable. “We don’t tell the truth in education. When I tell the truth, then I’m the bad guy.” He went on to explain that in a few instances where he had coaching

conversations with teachers about their performance or instruction, they complained to his boss and his evaluative comments were removed from the teacher's record.

Intellectual Wellness

Principals reported feeling stimulated and challenged at various moments throughout the school year. Preparing for the beginning of the year was an exciting time that required a great deal of mental focus to set goals and lay out a vision for the coming year. Other principals were excited when recruiting and selecting new staff. Principals described feeling intellectually stimulated and emotionally energized on those occasions when a teacher was struggling, and they got to coach them toward success or were able to intervene to help a student solve a problem. Serena shared, "I love it when teachers come in and share ideas and bounce ideas off of me and I'm like, 'Yeah, go for it.' If it doesn't work, tweak it, reflect."

Management vs. Leadership

The beginning of the school year can be especially stressful for principals, but most participants categorized this as positive stress that exhilarated and invigorated them. Nick and Rod both said they enjoyed hiring people for their buildings. Said Nick, "I love interviewing. I love to hire people." And Rod said, "I get a tremendous amount of satisfaction from hiring good people. From surrounding myself with good people."

On the opposite end of the spectrum, clerical or repetitive tasks such as email and routine building maintenance dragged them down. One participant complained, "The janitors catch and ask me what to do about fixing chairs and what to do with the parts that are broken. I mean, do I really have to decide what room they go in?" Serena shared her dislike for the tedious aspects of the job:

Like when you get into the mundane routine of doing the same thing every day like approving people's attendance, approving all the bills that are being paid, or making sure everyone has the overhead screens they need in their classroom. Those are the things we did last summer yet there I am ordering three more screens.

In short, the principals found acts of leadership personally and professionally fulfilling whereas management tasks tended to drag them down and stifle their intellectual satisfaction.

Social Wellness

Social wellness comes from feeling part of a community with an important contribution to make. The principals who worked in smaller communities experienced a great deal of community pressure to always be accessible and available. For these participants, they were always in the role of principal, even at church or dining in a restaurant in town. When asked to quantify the amount of time they were expected to be the principal, nearly everyone said 99%. As Rose explained it, "Any time I'm out in public, I'm still the school administrator. Parents will come up and ask a question. They know my home phone. They don't hesitate to call me at home." Both Diana and Chad explained that the high school is often the social hub of the community and the principal is required to be the ambassador of the community in addition to fulfilling their regular work responsibilities.

Privacy in the Community

A concern unique to the 21st century generation of principals I met with is an awareness of social media. Contemporary principals are vulnerable to being photographed or recorded and having conversations or photos posted on social media that cast them in an unseemly light. This awareness and possible lack of trust influenced how principals interact in public, even on a mundane errand like going to the grocery store. As one participant explained,

That's part of my reluctance to go to the store because I feel like I have to guard what I'm going to say. I've got to be careful. Anything I say is liable to be repeated or posted on social media and someone may have filmed it, too.

This awareness also contributed to why the principals were hesitant to socialize in public. Brad mentioned a predecessor who had been embroiled with the law over drinking in public and he was ever cautious to avoid making the same kind of mistake.

Nick once had to make the difficult decision to preserve the local community and social well-being of his staff at the expense of a personal relationship. He told a story about a colleague who applied for an internal job and Nick, as was his common practice, enlisted a committee of teachers and department heads to assist him in the selection process. The committee did not select his friend, and Nick was heartbroken for him. This created a difficult situation for Nick because the applicant was a current employee in the building and would have to continue working with both he and the members of the committee who did not select him.

Nick said,

He was hurt but I couldn't tell him, "The department didn't want you." So, I took responsibility and told him, "This was my decision" because I didn't want the relationship with the department to be ruined. That affected my well-being. Sleepless nights; I felt terrible afterwards.

This experience illustrates how principals often have to choose the less awful of two bad options and then bear the consequences alone.

Stressors and Burnout

In addition to Hettler's six dimensions of wellness, principals also spoke of stressors and precursors to burnout. Of the 10 participants I spoke to, two have resigned for the year and one

has taken early retirement due to the excessive demands of the job. Each of the three participants took this action as a pre-emptive effort to save themselves from poor performance due to burnout. Principals are adept at recognizing burnout in their teachers and a few participants described burnout as a linear process culminating in a discernible end point (e.g., resignation, transfer, or exit) they were able to see approaching. For example, Travis described the decline he noticed in one of his teachers. “It wasn’t just overnight; I’ve seen a progression.” However, in discussing their own experiences with burnout, principals described burnout as a cyclical feeling that ebbed and flowed depending on the time of year.

The Cyclical Nature of Burnout

As previously discussed in the findings, principals generally felt energized and invigorated by the start of a new school year. Rested and refreshed from the summer break, they were excited to begin with new staff, students, and even with new goals and expectations for the year. Later, as the pace of activities picked up and the demands of the job began to wear them down, they described feeling less optimistic, energetic, and more discouraged. In extreme cases, they might even feel hopeless. As Austin explained it, “Summertime is great and it’s much needed. First of the year, things are in good balance and then as the year progresses, partway through that second semester, that’s when things get really tough.” One principal declared, “You sit in here sometimes and think, ‘God, I’d dig a ditch right now rather than do this. I’d do anything other than this.’” Other participants fantasized about leaving the principalship altogether. “I could be framing houses right now,” rhapsodized one. “I could be a carpenter, which I did in college.” Despite the temptation to engage in escapist thinking, most principals are able to push through the “valleys,” as Austin described them, and reach for anticipated peak moments that would sustain them further in their jobs.

Community Pressure and Support

Participants described other principals they knew who had succumbed to the pressures of the job and left the profession. One principal described a colleague who “felt a lack of support from the community and finally resigned and went back to the classroom.” This colleague, he explained, “now enjoys having their evenings free and not having to answer their cellphone at 9 p.m.” Another principal gave a veiled description of watching a colleague intentionally self-destruct and be forced out of their position due to unethical or immoral behavior:

Some of the actions they took may be because of the stress. They find themselves compromising their job with the actions they were doing. They didn’t intend to lose their position over that...but it happened because they were doing those things...they put themselves out there maybe because deep down, they wouldn’t really care if they lose the job.

Although I was not able to talk to this principal, it seems reasonable to conjecture this person might have consciously or unconsciously taken action that ultimately cost them their job.

Safety as a Stressor

There were certain stressors the principals cited as reasons they might lose sleep or feel helpless about the job. Teen suicide and school shootings were stressors in the forefront of the minds of school principals. Darrell, for example, mused over how many weaknesses existed in his school’s safety systems and how futile it would be to implement those protocols if the threat came from inside your own school rather than from outside. He pointed out, “The kid could sit right out there in the car and have a high powered rifle and someone in here could pull the fire alarm and we are sitting ducks. Also, there are no buzz-in doors at football games.” Darrell described the stress of feeling helpless in the quest to “fix” students who were experiencing

trauma, suicidal thoughts, or threats of harm to self or others. “Everybody wants you to fix them,” he said somewhat critically. “Those people who are incapable of parenting, they send their kids in here and want us to fix them.” For Darrell, the very things that kept him up at night, such as student well-being and health, were also what gets him out of bed in the morning. He found it motivating to see students endure and overcome their personal obstacles.

Self-Care

Principals had a variety of strategies for engaging in self-care at work. All of them indicated that when they felt overwhelmed and exhausted, they went out to classrooms to watch their teachers and students. Rose enjoyed visiting choir class where she could listen to the students and teacher prepare for a concert. Rod preferred going to physical education classes because it triggered fond recollections of his days as a college basketball player. Nick liked hanging out with students in the lunchroom and chatting with them about one thing or another. At other times, it was necessary for principals to close the office door and indulge in a few minutes of uninterrupted peace. Brad said he might check scores on ESPN, a sports network. Chad temporarily ignored the phone to boost his energy with a sugary snack. Diana’s office was near a major pass-through in the school, so she would block the din by closing her door for a while and concentrating on deskwork. Travis said he would, “Shut the door and close my eyes for 3 or 4 minutes. Not like sleep but I would literally meditate and think through things.” These few minutes of mindfulness were a welcomed respite that helped him focus on the next task ahead.

The veteran principals learned through experience that delegation was a critical piece to maintaining wellness and exercising self-care. Austin shared that instead of trying to be all

things to all people, “I try as much as I can to disperse various responsibilities, activities, and evening activities.” And after considerable trial and error, Travis eventually figured out,

The principal is definitely the head of the building and they shouldn’t be afraid to delegate and say, “Hey, I need your help. Can you take care of this for me?” We should not be afraid to risk that vulnerability to others and admit I’m not going to be able to carry the weight of this whole building, every day, on every situation.

Both Austin and Travis admitted to learning the delegation lesson the hard way because they tried early in their principalship to do everything without asking for help.

Wellness Expectations

When asked what messages they received from their bosses about the expectations for principals to monitor or maintain wellness for themselves, the answers were disheartening. With little hesitation, the principals described the things they did to show love and encouragement to their staff members. These efforts often came in the form of special treats or human understanding when someone needed time away from work. Notably, the principals were less able to readily identify areas in which someone was watching out for their wellness as building leaders.

Additional Workload

In a few cases, their superintendents and surrounding community appeared to be oblivious to the sizable workload already placed on principals and would casually add extra obligations in the name of community good will. During a statewide bicycle race, for instance, Chad’s superintendent agreed to host the competitors overnight at the high school and provide three meals to the cyclists and support teams. Chad explained that as the principal of the host school, he had to attend several planning meetings throughout the school year and organize the

staff that would prepare and serve the meals. Chad also had to make several trips to purchase supplies for the meals. He was required to be on site from 6:30 am until 10:30 pm the first day of the event and at 4:45 the following morning to host a pre-race breakfast. He explained, “I’m not complaining but when someone else agrees to do that, they don’t know what it takes. Do you know how much I saw him [the superintendent] for that event?” Chad’s superintendent had a background in elementary education and according to Chad, his boss did not understand the numerous demands placed on a high school principal.

Diana experienced a similar stressor this past year when her building was selected by the state for a redesign project. Diana said, “It was a huge undertaking. A lot of research and lots of meetings...it was stressful.” Fortunately, Diana’s district hired a consultant, so she could stay on track and meet the expectations for the project while maintaining her role as the sole administrator in her high school. In Rose’s case, her board of education and superintendent realized the demands of the job were too much for one person to handle but provided relief too late for Rose to benefit. Upon her retirement, the board and superintendent agreed to hire an assistant principal to join the staff and help the new building principal. And due to increased student and community needs, they agreed to hire a full time school resource officer. The combination of these two new positions and her replacement caused Rose to pointedly joke that the district had to hire three men to fill the one position she vacated.

Is Principal Wellness a Priority?

Both Austin and Rod acknowledged that their districts have implemented an employee wellness program but so far, the programs amounted to little more than a monthly newsletter. When asked if her district did anything to promote principal wellness, Serena replied somewhat acidly, “Heck no. They probably think I’ll take care of myself.” Brad struggled to remember the

wellness initiative his district attempted. It seems it fell through before it even got off the ground. He recalled everyone agreeing they needed to be better about giving praise and “atta boys” but district leadership failed to execute the initiative. Darrell also revealed feeling slightly overlooked and forgotten when he rhetorically asked, “How hard would it be to say, ‘You guys have a great weekend, take care of yourself, and get that rest?’” He followed that lament with a reflection on how he should offer similar encouragement to his own staff more often.

There have been efforts on the part of some district’s leadership teams to acknowledge and alleviate the burdens they know are squarely resting on the shoulders of their principals. Austin described a “little thing that goes a long way” when he reported his district recently stopped requiring the principals to attend every board meeting, except when they were making a presentation to the board. He was grateful being excused from having to attend a non-essential evening event. He believed his superintendent and assistant superintendent “get it” because they have experienced a comparable level of responsibility themselves. Rod shared that his district has also given him the gift of time. For the past several years in December, he has been scheduled to attend an all-day principal’s meeting. However, because the meeting lasts for only a few hours, he is permitted to leave early with strict orders to “take the day” and not return to his building. While he admits that he still checks his email on that day, Rod has appreciated and taken advantage of the opportunity for a free day.

Principal Recommendations for Changing Conditions that Affect Wellness

When I asked participants what they wished their community, board, or superintendent would do differently to recognize and mediate some of the demands of the job, some of their answers included specific actions or ideas while others hoped for recognition or autonomy.

Prioritize Tasks

For example, Rod and Darrell expressed feeling overwhelmed at the number and variety of tasks and expectations placed in front of them. Rod was frustrated at the volume of initiatives in the building at any one time and the frequency with which the goals and targets changed:

A big part of the mental energy is synthesizing all these different masters into a single path. It's freaking tough sometimes. Am I serving the state accreditation master, the superintendent's strategic plan, or am I responding to our teacher evaluation model? All these masters you're trying to serve at the same time. And when you finally synthesize it and come up with a plan that incorporates all of them and you feel great about it, one of them changes.

Darrell's plea was similar to Rod's but more simply stated. He wanted more direction on prioritizing "the most important thing" since he was never going to accomplish every task in any given workday.

Limit Events Requiring Principal Presence

Austin and Chad wanted their districts to set limits on the number of evening events that required administrative attention and supervision. Chad explained,

With the state making cuts [to educational funding], one of the areas everyone attacked was having too much administration. So, everyone started cutting administration left and right. We have two administrators and there isn't enough time to be in the classroom, have conversations with staff members, and communicate with parents and kids. We get asked to do more than just schoolwork. We become a parent or friend, any title you want to throw at us. We become that person and are asked to come to this event or go to that meeting. It all takes a lot of time and energy and I don't have enough hours in the day to get it done properly, the way I think it should be done.

In a similar vein, Diana wished for additional administrative support because her district has no assistant principals in any building.

Disconnect from Pocket Technology

Nick, Austin, Serena, and Rod craved limits or controls on the 24-hour access provided by their phones and emails. Nick vowed he was going to disconnect his email from his phone over the summer whereas Austin attempts to disconnect and leave his phone off during holidays and family vacations. Exclaimed Serena, “These things [smart phones] are so ridiculous. God, email and texts just come in like crazy. Saturday morning, Sunday night, and it’s like, STOOOOP!!! Don’t you ever stop? Don’t you ever stop thinking about this?” Rod, knowing he cannot adequately discipline himself to stop checking his phone, wished his district would simply shut down all emails between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. Brad and Travis wished their bosses would recognize how the incessant communications impinge on their privacy. Brad would appreciate hearing when he has done well on a specific task or receive constructive feedback in the form of coaching. Travis would prefer to have his experience and knowledge respected and allowed to be more autonomous in his decision-making.

Despite their many desires for things to be easier and for some things to change, in general, the participants in this study exhibited a great deal of insight into their individual wellness and the factors that contributed to or prevented them from being well. While they acknowledged that various dimensions of their wellness could be improved, for most of them, the satisfaction and pleasure they took from serving their communities and students outweighed the negative consequences that accompanied the job. Even when the job became overbearing, such as in Rose and Chad’s case, they were able to articulate the triumphs and happiness they experienced serving as a high school principal. For the principals as a whole, it came down to a

choice between which consequences were costlier: the job or their wellness. Seven participants maintained a satisfactory wellness level and stayed contentedly on the job. In contrast, three chose in favor of improving their wellness by letting go of the job.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The job of high school principal is complex and demanding, which creates a wide range of distinct and overlapping challenges for principals concerned about maintaining their wellness. The 10 principals who participated in this study each dealt with their job demands and the obstacles to their wellness in ways that were similar but there were also unique circumstances that caused them to cope in their own individual ways. I have compiled the discussion points in this section of the chapter using the data from each principal's perceptions of wellness, the literature review, and from the theoretical framework. This section discusses major themes that emerged from the findings.

Principal Wellness is not a Binary Phenomenon

Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness was a useful framework to use for this study because wellness is a complex and multi-dimensional concept. It is conceptually unlikely that any person is ever entirely well or unwell. The principals in my study unanimously reported that their physical wellness was the most neglected of any dimension, yet they all found contentment and satisfaction in at least one other wellness dimension such as social, emotional, or spiritual. It would be inaccurate to use a limited definition of wellness to assign a binary value such as well or unwell to a person when the professional and personal aspects of their life are exceedingly complex and multidimensional. One difficulty I encountered applying Hettler's analytical framework was that theoretically, there is a great deal of overlap in the dimensions of wellness. Spiritual wellness comes from feeling like one has a purpose in life. For the principals in my study, for example, who derived much of their purpose from their occupation, occupational wellness for them was complexified by fulfilling their purpose. None of the dimensions were

discreet or isolated and parsing out the challenges of participants in a specific dimension was sometimes difficult.

All of the principals in the study reported feeling less physically well than they could or should be. Several participants acknowledged needing to eat better, make more time for exercise, and improve their sleep habits. While the literature suggests 10% of principals have a substance abuse problem (Glass et al., 2000), the only substances reported “abused” by my participants were sugar and caffeine. Despite the fact that every one of them had ready access to gym, pool, track, or other fitness facilities, no one availed themselves of these resources by engaging in physical exercise on their school campus. Somewhat incongruously, all participants indicated a desire to improve their physical condition and each experienced varying levels of success with diet, exercise, and sleep.

The literature reviewed for this study cited isolation as both an inherent challenge in the job due to limited time for relationships and as an antecedent to burnout (Bakker et al., 2004; School Leaders Network, 2014). The participants in this study did not report experiences with isolation that were consistent with the literature. Each principal cited supportive relationships both inside and outside of work and no one reported feelings of loneliness or depression. Emotionally, the principals who participated in this study considered themselves quite well overall and seemed to have ample mechanisms for coping and managing their emotional wellness by monitoring and maintaining their relationships and solitude as needed. The literature about wellness also cited female administrators as being more likely than males to be divorced (Gupton, 2010) yet the large majority of my participants had been married for decades and the two who had divorced were males. I cannot determine whether the job was a contributing factor in those divorces.

Conflict between Management Tasks and Leadership Responsibilities

Though evening activities and observing teachers were the two aspects of the high school principal's job that consumed the most time, the participants in my study universally reported there could be an infinite number of things people expected them to do. In terms of management tasks, they reported being responsible for mundane things like signing checks, approving payroll, and assigning rooms to furniture and equipment. In contrast, when it came to leadership responsibilities, principals were looked to as the visionaries, goal setters, trailblazers, and pied pipers of education who must get all staff moving in the same direction toward a common goal. Falling somewhere between management and leadership came social and relational obligations such as being visible in the community and being full time ambassadors for their schools and school district. As was evident in the data from a few cases, principals may also find themselves acting as counselor and caregiver to families and staff members in crisis. Their multiple roles mean they alternately serve as researchers, data analysts, food service workers, and even substitute teachers if the situation calls for it.

When we discussed intellectual stimulation or wellness, the principals became energized and enthusiastic at the chance to discuss the parts of the job that invigorated their thinking. They thrived on opportunities to share their vision and engage staff in enacting that vision. When they saw the results of their efforts to inspire and lead teachers and students to success, they were fulfilled and satisfied with their work. Conversely, time spent attending to management tasks and clerical work stifled their creativity, diminished their energy flow, and deadened their spirit. Notably, it was during the discussion of these chores that they entertained the idea of seeking a different profession.

The idea that leadership is the most invigorating and enjoyable aspect of the job of high school principal is encouraging as trends in education are shifting away from management toward a visionary forms of leadership. The principals in my study are at their best when they are leading, but feel less enthusiastic about their job when they are managing. Current trends in principal leadership notwithstanding, managerial elements of the high school principal's position are part and parcel of the job. While it is feasible to imagine delegating a greater portion of the managerial tasks, it is unrealistic to believe they can somehow be eliminated. In fact, these technical requirements are likely to expand as the principal's job becomes steadily more complex. Visionary leadership may continue to receive increasing district and public attention but this preferred dimension of the position will have to co-exist with rather than displace the mundane managerial side of the job.

The Context of a Small Community

One phenomenon not discussed in the literature about wellness but prevalent among my participants was a strong desire to embrace the community surrounding and including their school. This desire appeared motivated, in part, by concern for the benefits these close attachments would afford their own children. Of the study participants with children of high school age, all of them ensured their children would attend and graduate from the school they presided over. Without exception, they were eager and excited to have their children attend with them. There were also a few instances where participants returned to, or never left, the communities in which they had grown up and spent their entire teaching career prior to becoming a principal. These principals agreed that they enjoyed a high degree of social wellness because their community connections were so strong and enduring.

In small communities in particular, the high school is often the hub of the community and the principal is somewhat like the mayor of the town.

Burnout is Cyclical, not Linear

Despite the daily chaos that reigns supreme in the life of a high school principal, each academic year begins and ends essentially the same way because the seasons and school calendar are largely stable and unchanging. This predictability may actually be a blessing in disguise because it allows principals to cope with and manage the stress they experience throughout the school year. For example, they understand from their many years in education that despite the tension of bringing a semester to a close and ensuring that final exams and course grades are completed, the respite of a long holiday is sure to follow. All in all, principals are able to regulate their energy levels on an as needed basis because they know any immediate stress is short lived and relief--however temporary--is on the horizon.

The Importance of Prioritizing Family

The principals in my study acknowledged they were not functioning highly in terms of work-life balance, or occupational wellness. No one reported that their family relationships were strained or in danger, but they did acknowledge with gratitude the support provided by their spouses that enabled them to devote the bulk of their time to their careers. The literature supports the conclusion that the spouses and families of high school principals share the burden of job expectations (Bruckner, 1998). I did not interview any spouses for my study so only the principals themselves reported their thoughts. The principals who did acknowledge the fragility of their occupational wellness were very clear about their priorities. They were explicit in explaining that if their home life or emotional relationships were ever at risk of falling apart, they

would prioritize those relationships over their job as principal and make whatever career changes were necessary to preserve their family.

Balancing the Scales of Wellness

In every case, the greatest barrier to any element of wellness was the amount of time demanded by the job. Principals spent up to 60 hours a week at school or working from home. With routinely heavy workloads such as this, they could not make time for health, family, or social pursuits to a level they, their friends, or family would enjoy. Additionally, their role as principal caused some of them to self-select out of opportunities to engage in social or community activities outside of work because they could never fully escape the essentially 24-7 role of high school principal. In response, some principals decided to stop going to church while others avoided shopping or dining in the town where they worked. Most principals chose not to socialize with friends who were in education. However, there were occasions when they found it helpful to have someone who shared their common language and experiences as part of their support network.

Conversely, innumerable situations at work reminded principals the work they did was fulfilling and important. For example, they were fulfilled and strengthened in their resolve to continue their work as school leaders when they engaged with students in the lunchroom or observed student learning in classrooms. Several principals concurred that the pinnacle of each school year occurred when they graduated another class of seniors. Participants also pointed out that hiring and working with teachers contributed significantly to job satisfaction and wellness. Helping teachers be better instructors or helping them grow and reflect about their practice was incredibly nurturing to the principals I talked with. They drew energy and sustenance from these

victories, both large and small. At the same time, remediating or correcting adult behavior was discouraging and a drain on the emotional and time resources of each principal.

The Myth of the Superprincipal

The high school principals I interviewed seemed to have bought into the myth of the superprincipal (Copland, 2001; Eckman, 2004). Tacit acceptance of this narrative was manifest in the way they viewed their role as one of self-sacrifice performed in the service of others. For instance, they generously gave of their time and talents, often to the detriment of themselves. They steadfastly refused to admit to anyone outside of their closest inner circle when they were struggling or feeling overwhelmed. Notably, this sacrifice and service to others often created both job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. They were rarely able to resist helping everyone else, even if these ministrations came at personal or emotional cost to themselves.

Although every participant treasured the students and staff they served and gave willingly to help them succeed, they did not always have a choice about how much and when they gave. These ongoing physical and emotional expenditures often took a toll on the principals, creating stress, exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and in some cases, burnout to the point of leaving the job. Those who stayed in the job found sufficient nourishment in the positive outcomes they created. Others enjoyed their ability to successfully navigate the cycle of stress and fatigue they experienced in every school year. The scale for these participants seemed balanced just enough to rally and recover from one stressful event or time of year before moving on to tackle the next challenge.

Suggestions for Improving Wellness Conditions

Some of the literature cited in this study offered recommendations that were intended to help principals combat isolation through mentoring support (Beisser et al., 2014; Harding, 2016;

School Leaders Network, 2014). Other research provided suggestions to help with time management by making meetings shorter or giving principals more freedom to delegate tasks (Beisser et al., 2014; Harding, 2016). I found it surprising, therefore, that the participants in my study were largely unable to offer suggestions or recommendations that applied to the unrealistic culture of expectations they labored under or the imperceptible harm imposed by the superprincipal myth so often written about. They simply could not envision a way to help their communities and constituents recognize and understand the pressure and burdens the job placed on them.

When I shared with principals an example recommendation of release time after an evening activity, they scoffed at the notion as unfeasible instead of weighing its possibilities. I interpret their need to be the paragon of hard work in their school as an untenable approach to building leadership that does not allow them to entertain the idea of taking time off after a long night of activities. Their rationale was that since students and coaches attended those activities and no one offered them compensatory time off from school or work then they were not entitled to the time either.

My participants often suggested they would work more productively if they could develop a stronger sense of urgency about the tasks higher-level district administrators asked them to accomplish. The tendency of the principals was to assign the same amount of importance to everything and view every task as a priority. They wished their bosses or staff were able to identify what assignments were most critical, so they could better manage the order in which they tackled those tasks. Further, being yoked to 24-7 communication access was something the principals wanted adjusted. They felt enslaved by their smartphones, particularly to email. If district officials empowered them to unplug or disconnect their pocket technology,

they principals would enjoy a greater degree of work-life balance, which was sorely lacking now in their professional lives.

In general, school districts and communities would save time and money if they paid greater attention to the wellness of their high school principals. Whether the turnover rate is 20% as the literature suggests, or 50% as my study bore out, the cost of recruiting, selecting, and training a high school principal is quite high for the students and the staff of a school. The principals in my study were all familiar with wellness initiatives in their districts but did not acknowledge that these initiatives were especially beneficial to the staff or themselves. When asked if anyone in particular was looking out for their wellness, sadly, the principals did not believe so. School districts recognized that wellness among their students and staff was a high priority, as evidenced by the many wellness initiatives each district in my study had implemented, albeit with varying degrees of effectiveness. Based on my data, it was an unfortunate oversight that the idea of principal wellness was not equally valued.

In a small rural community, where the high school principal is a more visible leader than even the superintendent and so much of the town's entertainment and culture revolves around the high school, it would stand to reason that frequent turnover and churn of principals would unsettle the community as much as it does the staff and students. One would hope a school's stakeholders would call for solutions to ensure greater longevity and job satisfaction for their principals, especially in light of the negative consequences that frequent principal turnover has on student achievement (Harding, 2016; Luebke, 2014; Peterson, 2001). Since many of the principals in my study were homegrown within their community, it is logical to assume that another future principal is currently incubating within that same community. Yet, given the wellness conditions described by my participants, the job is not very attractive, and recruitment

could become a larger problem in the future. The literature suggests that fewer teachers are interested in pursuing positions as administrators because they find the stress and job demands incommensurate with the accompanying pay raise (Howley et al., 2005).

Recommendations for Further Study

All but one of the schools represented in this study were rural or suburban and not demographically diverse in terms of student or staff population. The number of non-white students and staff was lower than in urban schools nearby, as was the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Even the one school that was part of a large urban district was the least racially and economically diverse of all schools in the district. This meant that in terms of demography, it more closely resembled the adjacent suburban schools. Importantly, the principals of my study schools did not report student achievement and graduation rates as stressors. Research on principal wellness in settings where student enrollment is more racially or economically diverse, or in schools where student achievement and graduation rates are compelling everyday challenges would be worthy of additional examination. While the principals in my study were clearly overworked and exhausted, none reported facing pressure from local, state, or federal oversight to improve their school's performance. This additional pressure is likely to influence the job satisfaction and burnout symptoms of principals in urban, low performing schools and make wellness issues more dynamic and unavoidable. Even in smaller rural or bedroom communities, the principals in my study were aware of and pushing their staff to be more proactive and informed about their students experiencing poverty or trauma. However, a principal of a high poverty school or with a student population subject to high levels of trauma exposure may report their wellness perceptions differently.

This study is important to understanding the pressure and stress experienced by high school principals, despite differences in population from urban schools. As reported in my data, principals are experiencing various degrees of unwellness. The upshot of this finding is that the relative influence of school and district environments should not be overlooked. When I began the study, I held the assumption that lack of diversity and smaller community would make a high school principal's job easier. In reality however, there may be a tradeoff if urban high school principals experience lower levels of scrutiny and engagement that living within the community requires of the principals in my study. The needs of students and staff, while not necessarily based in economic or family hardship, can be just as pressing and the principals in my study gave no less of themselves or their time to ensuring the success of their entire school and community.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Principal Recruitment Letter

January 16, 2018

Dear (Staff Member):

I am requesting your participation in a research study about perceptions of wellness among Kansas high school principals. I am a WSU doctoral student conducting this study as a requirement for my Ed. D. and have secure your superintendents' permission. The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions you have about your own wellness and how the job of high school principal contributes to or detracts from your wellness either personally or professionally. I am contacting you because your role as a principal at (school name) places you in a position to provide information that is important for my study.

If you agree to participate, you will participate in two face-to-face interviews lasting up to one hour each. Interviews will be held at a location and time that is convenient for you. The benefits of this research will include improved understanding of principal's perceptions of wellness, as well as enhanced understanding of how job expectations and demands nurture or neglect the wellness of high school principals.

I very much want you to participate and hope to hear from you soon. Please contact Jennifer Sinclair via email at jjsinclair@shockers.wichita.edu by (date) to schedule our first interview time.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

Dr. Eric Freeman (Principal Investigator)
Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership, Educational and School Psychology
eric.freeman@wichita.edu
(316) 978-5696

I look forward to hearing from you,

Jennifer Sinclair
WSU Doctoral Student

Appendix B: Interview Question Protocol for Building Principals

INTERVIEW #1

Hello, my name is Jen Sinclair, and I am a doctoral student in Wichita State University's Educational Leadership program. I appreciate your willingness to assist me by participating in this interview. I am working to learn about perceptions of wellness of high school principals and how the job can influence your perception of wellness, either negatively or positively. The name of the study is "*Striving for Balance: A Multidimensional Analysis of Secondary School Administrator's Wellness*"

You have been selected to participate in the study because as a high school building principal, you have unique knowledge which will contribute to the research.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversations. To ensure confidentiality, no names will be used when I report the results of the session. With your permission, I would like to audio-record our session so that I will be able to make accurate analysis directly from your comments. The digital recording of our conversation will be transcribed and again, for confidentiality, the recording and transcription will be kept in a secure location for the duration of, and after the conclusion of, the study. This session will last approximately 60 minutes.

Review the signed Informed Consent with the participant.

Protocol Questions:

1. Tell me about your school. What are the demographics of your student population? Do you have any special programs? How many staff members and the approximate demographics of the staff?
2. Tell me about your educational background and work history in education.
3. What is your career trajectory? How did you get here and what's next for you?
4. Please describe your family/home situation. Married/single? Kids/grandkids?
5. Tell me your demographic information.
6. Is there anything else you want me to know about you?
7. Do you know of any colleagues who are no longer practicing principals who might be willing to participate in this study?

Appendix C: Interview Question Protocol for Building Principals

INTERVIEW #2

Hello, my name is Jen Sinclair, and I am a doctoral student in Wichita State University's Educational Leadership program. I appreciate your willingness to assist me by participating in this interview. I am working to learn about perceptions of wellness of high school principals and how the job can influence your perception of wellness, either negatively or positively. The name of the study is "*Striving for Balance: A Multidimensional Analysis of Secondary School Administrator's Wellness*"

You have been selected to participate in the study because as a high school building principal, you have unique knowledge which will contribute to the research.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversations. To ensure confidentiality, no names will be used when I report the results of the session. With your permission, I would like to audio-record our session so that I will be able to make accurate analysis directly from your comments. The digital recording of our conversation will be transcribed and again, for confidentiality, the recording and transcription will be kept in a secure location for the duration of, and after the conclusion of, the study. This session will last approximately 60 minutes.

Review the signed Informed Consent with the participant.

Protocol Questions:

1. How do you define wellness?
2. In what facets are you as well as you could or should be? In which ones are you not?
3. What would need to change for you to be well? At what point would you decide to make those changes?
4. What do you enjoy the most and least about your job as a building principal?
In other words, what feeds you and what drains you?
5. Describe the state of your work life balance.
6. What strategies or tricks do you employ to manage wellness at work?
7. What do you do to address your own wellness outside work?

APPENDIX C (continued)

8. Who or what do you lean on for support either professionally or personally?
9. Where do you find meaning or purpose in your work?
10. Think of a time you had to follow a policy or make a decision that went against your values or beliefs and tell me how you resolved that situation.
11. Tell me about when you felt stimulated intellectually or when you feel stifled intellectually at work.
12. Describe the culture of expectations in your workplace for principals and their wellness.
13. Are there places that you know of that this culture is not working for you or for your colleagues?
14. What improvements or modifications would you suggest for improvement in this culture of expectations?
15. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you'd like to discuss in terms of wellness?