Advancing Equity

Bolstering the Pathway to the Principalship

Improving School Outcomes

The Role of Assistant Principals:

Evidence and Insights for Advancing School Leadership

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FOREWORD

It's time to start paying more attention to the role of the assistant principal, an increasingly prevalent position in our nation's schools. If readers take away a single message from this report—the second of three research syntheses Wallace plans to publish this year—we hope that's the one.

Let me share some context for that statement. The past two decades have seen growing recognition that school leadership is a vital ingredient in good schools. The publication earlier this year of the first research synthesis, *How Principals Affect Students and Schools*, underscored that point, finding that effective principals have substantial positive impacts on student achievement and attendance, as well as on teacher satisfaction and retention.

New evidence has emerged as well about the role principal supervisors can play in supporting principals, and about the benefits for student achievement of comprehensive, aligned principal pipelines—a systematic approach to developing and supporting principals. Spurred by the evidence on leadership, states and districts are increasingly including leadership in their school improvement plans.

Yet the role of the *assistant* principal—which for many aspiring school leaders is the last formative step on the route to becoming a principal—has received far less attention. That was one reason we commissioned a team of researchers to synthesize what is known about the role. (The third synthesis, on principal preparation and professional development, is expected to be published later this year.)

The authors—Ellen Goldring and Mollie Rubin, from Vanderbilt University, and Mariesa Herrmann, from Mathematica—took a twofold approach to their task. First, they synthesized 79 empirical studies, describing the rigor and shortcomings of the research. Second, they invested in new research, collecting and analyzing data on assistant principals from two states, and analyzing longitudinal, national data.

It's important to acknowledge the limitations the researchers faced. They note that, to date, a robust body of research about the role has yet to be developed. For example, more than 20 studies conflate findings about principals and assistant principals, obscuring results for the latter. It's clear that more research, including with large-scale data sets, is needed.

Nonetheless, based on what they were able to learn, the team makes what is, in our view, a sound case that the role has untapped potential to help educators achieve important goals including diversifying the principalship, preparing effective principals, and improving equitable outcomes for students.

The team's argument in *The Role of Assistant Principals: Evidence and Insights for Advancing School Leadership* rests in part on the authors' documentation of the explosive growth in the number of assistant principals. Between 1990–91 and 2015–16, the number of assistant principals increased by a whopping 83 percent to 81,000 from about 44,000. Over the same period, the proportion of schools with the position jumped from one-third to one-half. What's more, today about three-quarters of principals have spent time as an assistant principal, making the role "an increasingly
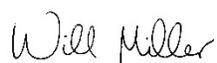
common stepping-stone" to the principalship. In other words, assistant principals are increasingly part of a school's leadership team and part of the pipeline to the principalship.

In addition, the researchers documented some puzzling disparities, drawing on both the national data and an examination of data or available research from six states. A higher proportion of assistant principals across the six states are people of color (24%) than are principals (19%) and teachers (13%); nationally, principals of color are more likely to have experience as an assistant principal than white principals. Studies from Texas find that educators of color are less likely to advance directly to the principalship, and more likely to become assistant principals than white educators, but findings from other states are mixed. There is limited evidence to explain these racial differences in advancement, although the authors note that some research suggests differences in access to mentoring and discrimination in hiring might be driving the patterns. In terms of gender, compared to the representation of women among teachers in the six states (77%), a smaller proportion (52%) of both principals and assistant principals are women. Studies of barriers to women becoming assistant principals and principals had mixed findings, but some suggest factors could include family responsibilities and possibly hiring bias as well as less mentoring and encouragement to become a leader.

Given the importance of a diverse pool of school leaders to more closely reflect the diversity of America's student body (for example, in the six states, 34% of students were of color), better understanding these patterns and their implications is crucial, the researchers note. Among key questions they raise: Is the additional experience that people of color have as assistant principals beneficial, leading to better preparation—or detrimental, lengthening their ascent to the principalship or leading them to exit the profession? To what extent could factors like hiring discrimination and lack of mentoring explain differences in advancement? And do unique barriers exist at the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender?

Though these important questions remain, the authors describe several ways that the role could be strengthened. The assistant principalship could be used strategically to better prepare future principals by ensuring it provides effective leadership experiences and professional development. Barriers to advancement could be addressed to help diversify the principalship. And because of their work with students, teachers and families, assistant principals could play even more important roles in creating a productive climate and improving students' academic, social and emotional, and behavioral outcomes.

Clearly, there is much more to learn. Nonetheless, we hope this report will spur reconsideration of what the authors call an "increasingly prevalent yet often overlooked role." Then, let's begin the work of supporting the professionals in these positions so the assistant principal role can reach its full potential in contributing to the success of all the nation's students.

Will Miller
President, The Wallace Foundation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past 25 years, the number of assistant principals has been steadily increasing, as has the number of principals with prior experience as an assistant principal. However, the knowledge base on assistant principals has not grown in parallel with their increased presence in schools.

Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers have not reached consensus on what the assistant principal role should entail, how to best prepare and support assistant principals, and how to effectively prepare them for success as principals. There is also little discussion about how the assistant principal role can promote equity and diversity in the pathway to the principalship as well as contribute to equitable experiences and outcomes for students, teachers, and staff.

In this report, we present the results of a systematic synthesis of 79 empirical research studies on assistant principals published since 2000, including both quantitative and qualitative studies. To address gaps in this research base, we supplement the synthesis with new analyses of national data and data from two states, Tennessee and Pennsylvania. This report provides a descriptive portrait of the assistant principal role. It then addresses two important issues: diversity and equity among assistant principals and assistant principals' influence on student and school outcomes. The report addresses five research questions:

- How prevalent are assistant principals? Which principals tend to have experience as an assistant principal?

- What are assistant principals' leadership roles?

- What is the pathway to the assistant principalship and from the assistant principalship to the principalship?

- How does access to the assistant principalship and principalship differ by educators' race, ethnicity, and gender?

- What is the relationship between the assistant principal role and school outcomes? What is the relationship between experience as an assistant principal and future principal performance?

Based upon our interpretation of the research, we set forth an agenda for redefining and reframing the assistant principal role in three areas: (1) clarifying how the assistant principal role can be a stepping-stone to prepare effective principals, (2) exploring whether the role should be a discrete career position for some assistant principals rather than only a stepping-stone on the pathway to the principalship, and (3) examining how the role can contribute to a more diverse and equitable pathway to the principalship. We also present an agenda for future research.

A time to reconsider the role of the assistant principal

Now is a critical time to reexamine the assistant principal role for several reasons:

The assistant principal role is an increasingly common stepping-stone to the principalship. The pathway to the principalship is a leadership continuum, beginning for many educators as teacher leaders, then moving into the assistant principalship and onward to the principalship. Because most

principals come from the ranks of assistant principals, it is imperative to consider how to explicitly design the assistant principal role as a stepping-stone to effective principal leadership.

The assistant principal role can contribute to a more equitable pathway to the principalship. Research shows that people of color are underrepresented in the principal role, relative to their representation among students. The assistant principal role can promote diversity in the principal pipeline by providing equitable access to leadership experiences and professional development in preparation for the principalship.

Assistant principals are uniquely positioned to promote equitable outcomes for students. Many schools have shifted toward a distributed leadership model in which school leadership responsibilities are shared among principals, assistant principals, department chairs, and teacher leaders. Many assistant principals work closely with students, teachers, and families and thus play a direct role in improving students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral outcomes. It is important to consider the training and skills necessary for assistant principals to engage in effective and equity-oriented leadership practices.

Assistant principals can help address principal attrition and teacher shortages. Current trends in education suggest ongoing principal attrition and teacher shortages. Assistant principals are well situated to provide a pool of experienced school leaders who are prepared to step into principal vacancies. Assistant principals may also help schools retain effective principals through collaborating on leadership responsibilities to make the principal role more manageable, thus reducing principal burnout and turnover. Additionally, research suggests that school leaders play an important role in creating positive and favorable teacher working conditions, indicating that assistant principals may be well-positioned to cultivate school cultures that attract and retain teachers.

Opportunities that come with experience as an assistant principal may be increasingly important for effective school leadership. Many schools have shifted away from a model where the principal alone is responsible for school improvement to a more distributed leadership approach. Studies demonstrate that school leadership is increasingly diffused to include leadership teams typically composed of assistant principals, department chairs, and other teacher leaders. It is therefore paramount to reimagine the training and skills for assistant principals to fulfill leadership responsibilities and prepare them to take on the responsibilities of the principalship.

Key findings

- **The number of assistant principals has been steadily increasing over the last 25 years, particularly in elementary schools, and has outpaced the increase in the number of principals.** We estimate that between 1990–1991 and 2015–2016, the number of assistant principals in the United States increased from 43,960 to 80,590. Over this period, the proportion of schools with an assistant principal rose from about one-third to more than half (Figure ES.1). Much of this growth is explained by an increase in the percentage of elementary schools with assistant principals but is not fully explained by the increase in the size of elementary schools over this period. There has also been an increase in the number of principals with prior assistant principal experience: from 1987–1988 to 2015–2016, the numbers of principals with assistant

principal experience grew from 39,100 to 69,600. Over these years, the proportion of principals with assistant principal experience increased from about half to more than three-quarters.

Figure ES.1. Nationally, the percentage of schools with assistant principals has increased over the past 25 years
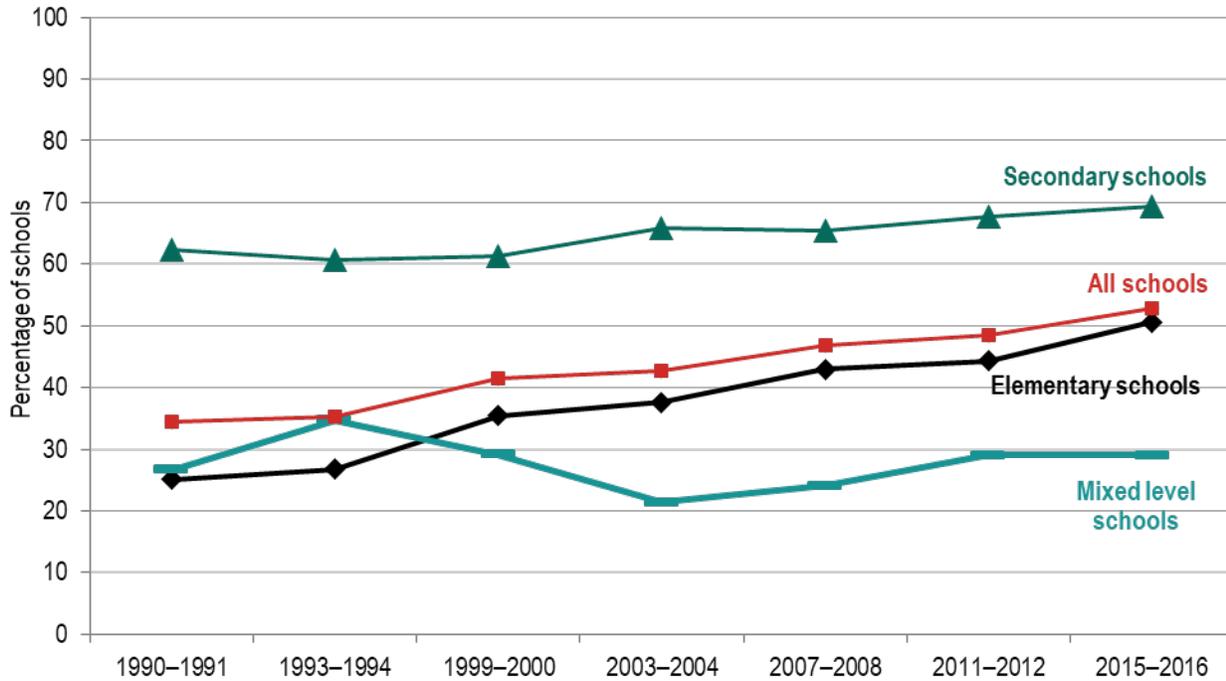
Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2007–2008, 2011–2012, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,970 in 1990–1991 to 5,770 in 2015–2016. Mixed level schools have both elementary and secondary levels, such as K–12 schools.

Little research exists on how and why the number of assistant principals is increasing and how the growing numbers in this role are allocated to schools. There is little understanding of whether assistant principals are strategically allocated to work in specific types of schools and whether the most effective assistant principals are assigned to schools that need them the most.

- **Assistant principals' leadership roles vary considerably.** Most assistant principals engage in a mix of instructional leadership, administrative management, and student discipline. Furthermore, some assistant principals undertake a broad range of leadership tasks, whereas others are more specialized in their role. Assistant principal leadership tasks are often assigned at the discretion of the principal, but there is no research examining how or why principals assign specific tasks or domains to their assistant principals. There are no unique professional standards for assistant principals, and assistant principals are typically evaluated on the same rubrics and processes as principals, although their responsibilities are not the same.

- **Preservice preparation programs do not specifically focus on training assistant principals, although most graduates initially serve as assistant principals before moving into the principalship.** Most assistant principals start along the leadership pathway in

preservice preparation for the principalship, and most graduates of these programs initially serve as assistant principals. There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of preservice preparation for assistant principals.

Assistant principals engage in various types of on-the-job training and development, but these supports are not available to all assistant principals. Assistant principals in rural areas and smaller districts are less likely to have access to mentoring, professional development, and networking activities than other assistant principals. Although assistant principals report that they value these experiences, there is very little evidence about the effectiveness of mentoring, professional development, or networking for success as an assistant principal or advancement to the principalship.

- **Educators of color are more likely to become assistant principals and less likely to become principals than white educators. Women are less likely to become assistant principals or principals than men.** People of color make up higher percentages of assistant principals than principals or teachers, although people of color are underrepresented among educators, relative to the student population. There are no national studies on the demographic characteristics of assistant principals, including race or ethnicity. However, across six states, on average, 24 percent of assistant principals were people of color, compared with 13 percent of teachers, 19 percent of principals, and 34 percent of students. There is limited evidence to explain these differences, but some research suggests that differences in access to mentoring and discrimination in hiring can be driving these patterns.

- **Limited evidence exists about whether and how assistant principals contribute to improved student and school outcomes.** One study indicated that an instructional leadership role for assistant principals improves student achievement. Other research suggested that assistant principals could address bias and inequality through their attention to cultural inclusivity and equitable learning environments.

- **There is little evidence of a relationship between assistant principal experience and future principal performance.** Many principals believe that prior experience as an assistant principal was instrumental to their work as principals. However, studies indicate that principals with assistant principal experience generally perform no differently than principals without assistant principal experience. Some aspects of prior assistant principal experience, such as serving as an assistant principal in a more effective school, might be related to improved student achievement, but evidence is still emerging.

- **Research topics on assistant principals vary widely, limiting the strength of the evidence.** Few research studies address similar research questions on assistant principals. Studies on the same topic use different measures or framing, making comparisons and synthesis across studies difficult. Although many studies provide contextual information about study participants and research settings, this information is rarely analyzed in findings. The research base often consists of a few small-scale, individual studies. Larger scale, systematic data collection is crucial to better understand the assistant principal role.

- **The quality of the research studies varies widely.** Some studies use multiple years of data and employ rigorous analytical methods to make well-founded claims; others are weaker in

execution. Findings about assistant principals and principals are commonly combined as findings about "school leaders," often obscuring important research results on assistant principals.

Setting an agenda for reframing and redefining the assistant principal role

Despite limitations in the research base on assistant principals, the research does point to strong trends, and there is sufficient evidence to set forth an agenda for the assistant principal role. We interpret the research and suggest recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to better harness the potential of the role.

The assistant principal role is well positioned to serve as a stepping-stone to the principalship and could be used strategically and consistently to better prepare future principals. The research evidence is clear that many assistant principals aspire to become principals, and many principals believe that serving as an assistant principal was valuable preparation for the principalship. However, assistant principals are not given systematic, sequential, or comprehensive leadership-building opportunities or ongoing evaluative feedback in preparation for the principalship. A refocused role can provide specific opportunities to prepare assistant principals for the principalship while simultaneously improving their effectiveness in their current role.

Intentionally designing the assistant principal role as a step along the pathway to the principalship can involve the following:

- Develop standards for assistant principals that are consistent with the role's function as preparation for the principalship.

- Implement developmental, sequenced leadership tasks and opportunities for assistant principals aligned to tailored performance standards.

- Articulate in job descriptions that the intent of the assistant principal role is to prepare future principals with a stronger focus on instructional leadership responsibilities.

- Provide principals with professional development on how to mentor assistant principals and delegate leadership tasks to help them grow.

- Implement unique systems of evaluation for assistant principals.

- Clarify policies around assistant principal standards, licensure, evaluation, advancement, funding and allocation to schools.

- Identify and expand ways to measure the impacts of assist principals on students and teachers.

Little evidence suggests that districts should invest in developing a discrete career for the assistant principal role that is separate from the role as a stepping-stone on the pathway to the principalship. At the same time, there is no direct evidence that a differentiated role would be ill advised. Districts looking to create a unique assistant principal position can face challenges, including differentiating the role from the principalship and other leadership positions and designing and implementing preservice preparation programs specifically for the assistant principalship.

Addressing barriers to assistant principal advancement for educators of color and women can contribute to a more diverse and equitable pathway to the principalship. Evidence suggests that educators of color and women face unique barriers to advancement, relative to white educators and men. Addressing these barriers to advancement specifically within the assistant principal position can advance equity and diversity along the pathway to the principalship.

Addressing potential barriers to advancement may require the following:

- Develop clearer policies and procedures for advancement along the pathway.

- Ensure equitable experiences in leadership roles while in the assistant principal position.

- Develop systems to ensure equitable access to mentoring, sponsorship, and professional development.

- Collect and analyze data by race/ethnicity and gender in district data systems, such as leader tracking systems, that can follow educators' career progressions.

- Implement equity audits for district policies and practices to understand barriers to advancement and putting into place responses to those audits.

Researchers should embark on a more coherent and larger-scale research agenda on the assistant principal role to inform policy and practice. The synthesis suggests several important gaps in the knowledge base, raising the following questions for future research:

- Why is the number of assistant principals increasing?

- Are effective assistant principals equitably allocated to schools?

- How do principals decide which tasks to assign to assistant principals?

- How do assistant principals work with other school staff?

- What leadership titles denote the assistant principal role?

- What are the most effective approaches to prepare and develop assistant principals?

- Why are educators of color more likely to become assistant principals than white educators and less likely to directly advance to the principalship?

- Are assistant principals of color promoted to the principalship at the same rate as white assistant principals?

- How can experiences in the pathway from teachers to principal be more equitable for educators of color and female educators?

- Which assistant principal roles are most related to improved student and school outcomes?

- How can assistant principals best advance equity for students and teachers?

- Which experiences as an assistant principal are most related to future principal performance, including in advancing equity for students and teachers?

Taken together, these recommendations, alongside robust, systematic research can set an agenda for the assistant principal role.

I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Prior research syntheses on the assistant principalship have noted that the assistant principal role can provide valuable preparation for the principalship and that assistant principals also serve important leadership roles in schools by supporting principals and teachers (Oleszewski et al., 2012; Hausman et al., 2002). However, since these prior syntheses, there have been many important changes in schools and school leadership, including increased attention to how the assistant principal role can advance equity for students and educators.

Policymakers, practitioners, or researchers have not reached consensus about what the assistant principal role should entail, what policies should guide the development of the role, how to evaluate and support assistant principals, and how to prepare them for success as principals. Furthermore, there is little guidance on how the assistant principal role can advance equity in the pathway to the principalship and foster equity for students and teachers. This lack of consensus is reflected in the recent research on the role, limited state policies pertaining uniquely to assistant principals, and unclear and variable role definitions and expectations.

The research presented here highlights the need to further develop the assistant principal role so that it can best serve as a training ground for the principalship, improve student and school outcomes, and diversify leadership pathways and the principalship.

A time to reconsider the role of the assistant principal

Now is the time for a renewed spotlight on the assistant principal role.

First, as we present in this report, the number of assistant principals has been steadily increasing, as has the number of principals with experience as an assistant principal. Nationally representative survey data from the Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey (SASS/NTPS) show that over the last 25 years the percentage of public schools that have an assistant principal has increased by 18 percentage points.[1] Given the growth in the number of U.S. public schools nationally, we estimate that the numbers of assistant principals in the United States have increased from 44,429 to 80,949 over the last 25 years—nearly six times as fast as the growth in the number of principals. Furthermore, the same data show that assistant principals are more common in schools in cities and suburbs; schools with assistant principals also typically serve greater numbers of students of color than schools without assistant principals.

Second, districts could consider the assistant principal role to promote diversity and equity in the educator labor market and to foster equity for students. Research shows that people of color are underrepresented in the principalship compared to their representation among students (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Folsom et al., 2015; Hussar et al., 2020). Assistant principals' work with students, teachers, and families means they can play important roles in improving students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral outcomes. Our synthesis specifically examines the relationship between

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[1] The Schools and Staffing Survey was redesigned and became the National Teacher and Principal Survey in 2015–2016.

the assistant principal role and diversity and equity, a topic that is currently underdeveloped in the research.

Third, research has documented ongoing principal attrition and teacher shortages. Recent research indicates that a high number of principals leave their positions each year, requiring a pipeline of assistant principals who are well prepared to step into the role. Nationally, 18 percent of public school principals in 2015–2016 left their school the following year, which implies nearly 18,000 principal vacancies per year (Goldring & Taie, 2018). In addition, one study reported that 42 percent of secondary school principals are considering leaving the principalship or moving to another school (Levin et al., 2020). Over the past two decades, the percentage of principals who have experience as an assistant principal has increased (Fuller et al., 2018; Hitt & Player, 2018; Protheroe, 2008), and most principals come from the ranks of assistant principals. By supporting principals, assistant principals can make principals' work more manageable, thereby helping to reduce principal turnover, burnout, and leadership shortages. Furthermore, a recent study indicated that school leaders can play important roles in creating the working conditions and school culture to attract and retain teachers (Podolsky et al., 2016). Assistant principals may be uniquely positioned to create and support these positive working conditions and cultures given their roles that involve ongoing interactions with students and teachers. However, we have limited understanding about the strategic distribution of assistant principals' leadership responsibilities.

Fourth, opportunities that come with experience as an assistant principal may be increasingly important for effective school leadership. Many schools have shifted away from a model where the principal alone is responsible for school improvement to a more distributed leadership approach. Studies demonstrate that school leadership is increasingly diffused to include leadership teams typically composed of assistant principals, department chairs, and other teacher leaders (Camburn et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2001, 2007). It is therefore paramount to reimagine the training and skills for assistant principals to fulfill leadership responsibilities and prepare them to take on the responsibilities of the principalship.

Purpose of this report

To help policymakers, practitioners, and researchers better understand the assistant principal role and leverage it to promote equity and school effectiveness, The Wallace Foundation commissioned a synthesis of empirical research since 2000 on assistant principals. To address gaps in this research, the synthesis is supplemented with new analyses of national data, state data from Tennessee and Pennsylvania, and a sample of assistant principal job descriptions from these same states.

In this report, we first provide a descriptive portrait of the assistant principal role. We then address two important questions related to the diversity and equity of the role and its influence on student and school outcomes. The report addresses five research questions:

- How prevalent are assistant principals? Which principals tend to have experience as an assistant principal?

- What are assistant principals' leadership roles?

- What is the pathway to the assistant principalship and from the assistant principalship to the principalship?

- How does access to the assistant principalship and the principalship differ by educators' race, ethnicity, and gender?

- What is the relationship between the assistant principal role and school outcomes? What is the relationship between experience as an assistant principal and future principal performance?

Based on our interpretation of the research, we pivot to set forth an agenda for reframing and redefining the assistant principal role in three areas: (1) clarifying how the assistant principal role can be a stepping-stone to prepare effective principals, (2) exploring whether the role should be a discrete career position for some assistant principals rather than a stepping-stone on the pathway to the principalship, and (3) examining how the role can contribute to a more diverse and equitable pathway to the principalship.

This report uses the definition of educational equity set forth by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). OECD defines educational equity along two closely intertwined dimensions—fairness and inclusion—both critically important in school settings. It defines fairness as "ensuring that personal and social circumstances—for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin—should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential" and inclusion as "ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all" (Field et al., 2007, p. 11).

Organization and overview of the report

We present our methodology, findings, and recommendations for an agenda for policy and research in the following chapters:

- Chapter II: The methodology for the research synthesis, review of job descriptions, and analyses of national and state level data

- Chapter III: The prevalence of the assistant principal role over time and the types of schools that have assistant principal positions, by regions in the United States, locales, student enrollment, and grade level

- Chapter IV: The assistant principal role, including job descriptions and the types of leadership work undertaken by assistant principals

- Chapter V: The pathway to becoming an assistant principal and then a principal, including the movement along the pathway from preservice preparation to ongoing support and development, including district pipeline programs

- Chapter VI: The experience of moving along the pathway to the assistant principalship and principalship for educators of color and women, including barriers to diversifying the pipeline

- Chapter VII: The assistant principal role and school outcomes, including the extent to which assistant principals improve outcomes at their schools and whether experience in the assistant principal position better prepares future principals

- Chapter VIII: A summary of the findings and recommendations for an agenda to reframe and redefine the assistant principal role

The report highlights the potential importance of the assistant principal role for improving school leadership and developing a diverse and equitable pathway to the principalship, given its growing prevalence among educators. This report also draws attention to the gaps in the research on assistant principals. The findings indicate the need to spotlight the assistant principal position by setting forth a coherent and comprehensive agenda for the role.

II. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, we describe the methods used to study the assistant principal role: a synthesis of research studies, new analyses of national and state administrative data, and analyses of a sample of assistant principal and principal job descriptions. The research synthesis includes empirical research studies that specifically report findings for assistant principals. Studies that include assistant principals but combine findings for assistant principals with those for principals or other educators and leaders, such as those on principal preservice preparation, are not included in this report.

Systematic synthesis of research studies

To ensure a rigorous, comprehensive synthesis of the existing empirical research, we used a four-stage process for systematic reviews adapted from Petticrew and Roberts (2006). We summarize our approach in Figure II.1 and discuss each of the four stages in detail below.

Figure II.1. Methodology for systematic synthesis of research studies

1. Prepare analysis plans

2. Gather and select studies

3. Analyze studies

4. Synthesize studies
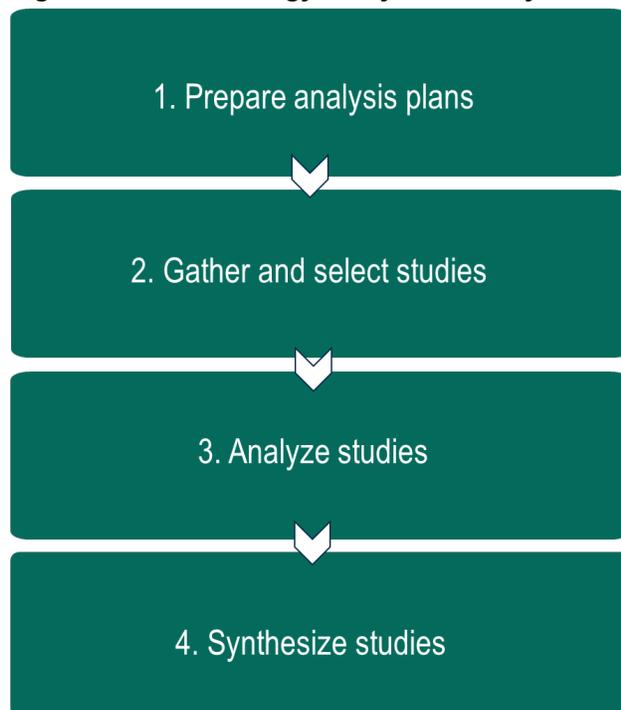
Stage 1: Prepare analysis plans. In the first stage, we planned the strategy for the systematic review of research studies, including identifying the databases of studies and sources of gray literature (unpublished studies)[2]; defining search terms (assistant principals, vice principals); and establishing criteria for including or excluding studies in the review. We developed a preliminary framework for coding and analyzing studies. As part of the coding framework, we defined a set of topics that aligned with the specific research questions of the project:

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[2] Gray literature refers to studies that are not published in sources such as books or peer-reviewed journal articles, such as research reports.

- Prevalence of assistant principals and types of schools that have assistant principals

- Roles of assistant principals

- Pathway to the assistant principal position and then on to the principalship, including preservice training and on-the-job support

- Experience moving along the pathway to the assistant principalship and principalship for educators of color and women and barriers to diversifying the pipeline

- The assistant principal role, experience as an assistant principal, and school outcomes and future principal performance

Stage 2: Gather and select studies. In the second stage, we gathered and selected studies for the synthesis. We searched for empirical research studies that were (1) conducted in the United States, (2) published in English between 2000 and mid-2019 (when we conducted the search), and (3) published in peer-reviewed journals or gray literature.[3] Searches included the terms *assistant principal* or *vice principal* and focused on public education, including charter schools. Specific search terms are shown in Appendix A, Tables A.1 and A.2.

We conducted comprehensive searches of eight major electronic databases (for example, ERIC, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect), as well as publications in the gray literature, including unpublished studies from the websites of 17 organizations, such as think tanks, research organizations, nonprofits, and organizations that focus on leadership issues and leadership development. (Specific information on the databases and organizations included in the search process, complete search terms, and the number of records retrieved from each search are in Appendix A, Tables A.1 and A.2). Before removing duplicates, we identified 1,903 studies, 1,733 from databases and 170 from gray literature. We then removed 220 duplicate research studies that appeared in multiple databases.

Next, we screened studies based on their titles and abstracts and excluded those that did not meet the inclusion criteria (for example, if the setting was schools outside the United States; see Table II.1).

We then reviewed the full text of the remaining studies, again excluding those that did not meet the inclusion criteria. For example, we excluded studies because they were not empirical or because they combined assistant principals and principals in the findings, aggregating results for school leaders. (In instances where we could disaggregate findings specific to assistant principals, we did not exclude the articles.) Figure II.2 shows the number of studies excluded within each review step. This process netted 62 studies for systematic review. We also reviewed the reference lists of included studies in a process called citation chaining and identified an additional 17 studies to include in the synthesis, for a total of 79 studies.

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[3] Because peer-review standards can vary by discipline, we used the Ulrichsweb database of academic journals to determine whether a publication met the standard of peer review. Ulrichsweb refers to peer-reviewed publications as "refereed." Ulrichsweb provides information on more than 300,000 periodicals. More specifically: "As used in the Ulrich's knowledgebase, the term refereed is applied to a journal that has been peer-reviewed. Refereed serials include articles that have been reviewed by experts and respected researchers in specific fields of study including the sciences, technology, the social sciences, and arts and humanities" (see https://www.ulrichsweb.com/ulrichsweb/faqs.asp).

Table II.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for database searches

	Focal population of study	Setting	Language	Time frame	Publication type
Include	• Assistant principals or principals. • Teachers in administrative preparation programs. • Principals reporting on how they use assistant principals in their schools. • Principals reporting on experience as an assistant principal.	Public schools—traditional and charter—in the United States	English	2000–2019	Empirical research in (1) peer-reviewed journals and (2) gray literature reports
Exclude	• Assistant principals not the focus of study. • Principals with no relevant findings to their experience as assistant principals. • Assistant principal data cannot be separated from other study participants (data are collected from assistant principals and principals, but results combine the two, making it impossible to distinguish between them).	Private schools and schools in countries other than the United States	Language other than English	Before 2000	Book chapters, conceptual pieces, theory pieces, opinion papers, letters to editor, book reviews, magazine articles, newspaper articles, editorials, dissertations, conference proceedings

Note: Publication type and peer review status are defined according to Ulrichsweb standards.

Figure II.2. Flow of literature search

Searched databases and gray literature

1,903 studies

Removed 220 duplicates

1,683 studies

Screened abstracts for basic criteria (population, locale, peer reviewed)

476 studies

Screened full text for basic criteria and relevance for synthesis research questions

62 studies

Screened articles from citation chaining for inclusion

79 studies fully coded
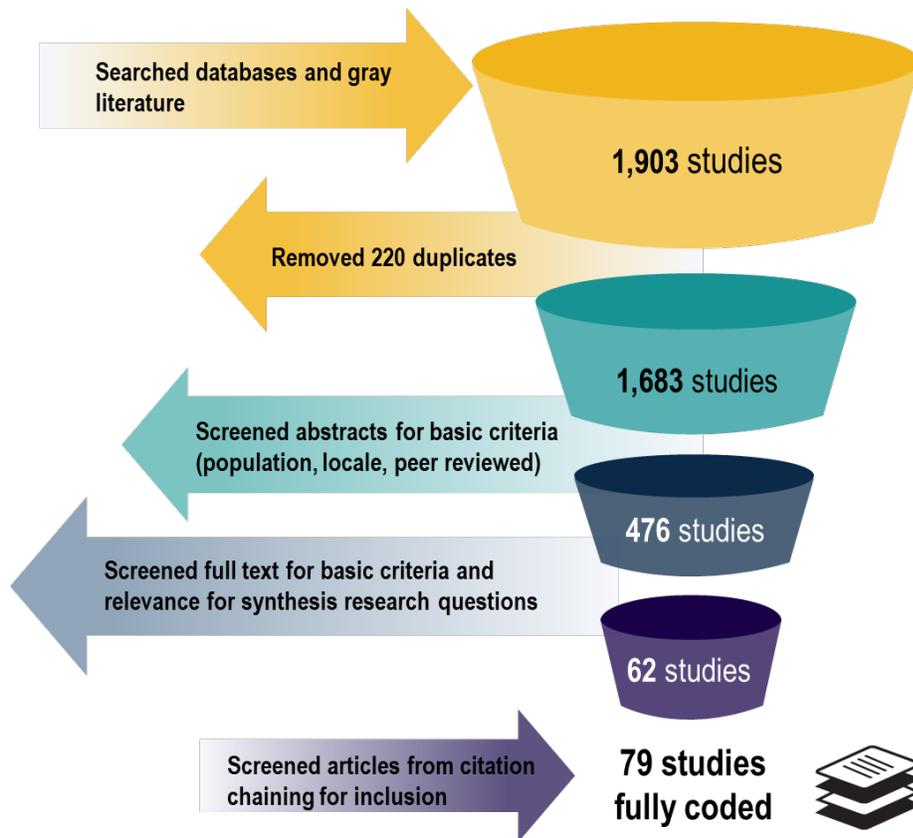
Stage 3: Analyze studies. After we completed the screening and review process, researchers systematically coded and analyzed the studies based on the coding framework. Because the studies in the synthesis represented a broad range of methodological approaches and topics, we devoted considerable effort to developing a coding approach that would capture the wide range of research studies while still allowing for comparisons across all studies. Researchers coded the following types of information about the methods, findings, and quality of each study: the topics addressed by the study (for example, the assistant principal role or pathway to the position); sample; methods; data sources; specific research questions; and findings. We developed forms to record detailed information about both qualitative and quantitative studies.[4]

Researchers coded quantitative studies according to criteria specific to the particular study design (for example, randomized control trial, quasi-experimental and correlational designs, and descriptive studies). Researchers coded a series of questions pertaining to the design, such as: Is there evidence that key variables are reliably measured? Has selection bias been properly addressed? What are the response rates?

For qualitative studies, researchers recorded information such as whether the research questions were clear and suited to the mode of inquiry; whether the sampling approach, data collection

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[4] For mixed methods studies, coders completed both a qualitative and quantitative form.

methods, and analytic approach were clearly defined; and if the claims made were supported by sufficient evidence.

For all studies, researchers used the information collected, particularly design-specific markers of quality, to provide an overall quality assessment, while also noting limitations.

Throughout the coding process, researchers established interrater reliability among team members to ensure studies were coded consistently and accurately. A subset of 13 studies (21 percent) were coded by two research team members. Researchers met to discuss and reconcile any differences from the double coding and then presented discrepancies to the larger research team to ensure that similar issues would be coded consistently moving forward.

Stage 4: Synthesize studies. In the fourth stage, we synthesized the coded research studies. We summarized the empirical research findings for each research question (topic) and analyzed the evidence in terms of number of studies, heterogeneity of the findings, and the quality of evidence in each study. As expected, the research designs, samples, or specific questions and measures differed significantly across studies; the studies' quality and scope were also highly variable. Some topics were largely absent from the literature (for example, the relationships between assistant principal background characteristics, experiences, and roles and effectiveness in the principalship). Other topics had multiple studies, such as those focused on assistant principals' tasks and roles. Consequently, the synthesizing process allowed for a holistic review of the research findings, as well as the identification of gaps in the research, rather than aggregating findings across studies with a quantitative aggregation, such as in a meta-analysis.

Types of research studies in the synthesis

The methodologies of the research studies on the assistant principalship vary widely and include both qualitative and quantitative methods (Figure II.3). Each broad methodological approach has strengths and, when used together in iterative conversation, can contribute to the evidence base on assistant principals. Qualitative studies offer depth and nuance and present the voices of those being studied. They are particularly powerful when examining questions around understanding the how and the why of phenomena, such as how do assistant principals of color perceive their roles when working in schools with few minority students or teachers? Or how do assistant principals experience mentoring? Qualitative approaches typically engage small numbers of research participants to achieve the depth and nuance of close observation necessary to capture the complexity of the topic under study.

Most of the qualitative studies in the synthesis are case studies. A case is typically defined as one situation, such as a preservice preparation program or the work roles of assistant principals in one school or one district. Case study research in the synthesis typically consisted of multiple interviews, supplemented with documents. Examples of questions addressed by case studies include a study (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) that followed one assistant principal who adhered to a culturally responsive leadership approach. This study asked, how does a culturally responsive assistant principal enact her leadership role with teachers, students, and parents? Another study compared the experiences of four assistant principals who were in the same professional development cadre years earlier to understand the transformation of their identities and the development of expertise

(McClellan & Casey, 2015). One question the authors asked was how do role modeling, mentoring, and feedback serve in the development of early career assistant principals? Interviews conducted without reference to a case, such as a sample of assistant principals and principals across multiple urban districts, were coded as interview studies.

The quantitative studies in the synthesis include larger samples than in the qualitative research base; some studying assistant principals in a district or state. Most of these studies use descriptive or correlational research designs. Studies characterized as descriptive present only descriptive statistics, such as the average number of assistant principals who plan to advance to the principalship. Studies classified as correlational examine relationships between variables, such as a study that assesses the extent to which assistant principals' job satisfaction varies by years of experience in the role. Five of the quantitative studies are simulated randomized controlled trials focused on hiring (for example, studies that send hypothetical assistant principal candidate resumes with different characteristics to randomly selected simulated hiring personnel, such as principals). Two studies use quasi-experimental designs to evaluate whether serving as an assistant principal influences future performance as a principal.[5] Mixed methods studies generally include both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Figure II.3. Research methodology varies widely

Qualitative = 31

Quantitative = 43

Mixed methods = 5

Number of studies
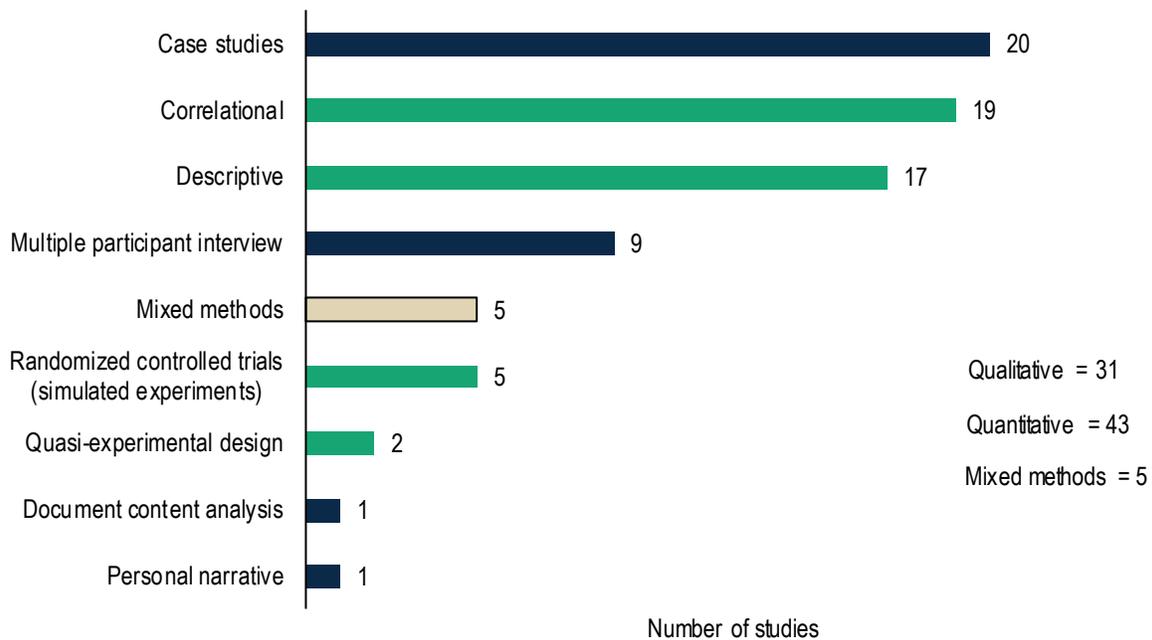
Studies in the research synthesis focus on a range of topics. For some topics, such as roles of assistant principals or mentoring support for assistant principals, there are small clusters of studies, though these studies rarely frame the research questions in similar ways or use comparable survey or interview questions. Studies that have similar sample characteristics, such as research conducted in high schools or on assistant principals who are people of color, rarely converge upon the same topic

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[5] This report also references two recent studies that use quasi-experimental designs (Grissom et al., 2020; Master et al. 2020). These studies were released after our systematic study search process and were not coded as part of the initial coding process, so are not included in the figure.

or research questions. For example, among eight studies of assistant principals working in high schools, topics range from culturally responsive leadership to perceptions of community involvement to satisfaction, with no two studies addressing the same research question. We summarize the quality of the research studies in Boxes II.1 and II.2. We conclude that despite the shortcomings of these studies, the preponderance of evidence provides a sufficient foundation for building a research and policy agenda about assistant principals.

Box II.1. Quality of research studies included in the synthesis

Strengths

- Large descriptive studies from entire states across multiple years

- Multiple years of data (longitudinal data) from two years to two decades

- In-depth interview studies that generate deep descriptions depicting assistant principals' experiences

- Diverse set of research questions and participant perspectives

Limitations

- Mostly self-reported perception data

- Limited attention to district and program context

- Lack of clarity in some studies as to how and why researchers selected specific participants

- Some studies are small or may be biased (due to low survey response rates or unreported response rates)

- Few studies are replicated to ascertain depth of findings

- Most studies report data collected from one point in time

- Few studies provide information about steps taken to ensure reliability or validity of the findings

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Box II.2. Characterization of the research studies

- Studies include assistant principals who work in elementary, middle, and high schools; the studies rarely compare these settings.

- The studies are largely conducted in the South, with far fewer studies in other regions of the United States (Figure II.4). Of the 37 studies in the South, 9 were carried out in Texas and 9 in Florida.

- Most of the qualitative studies are conducted in urban locales, while quantitative studies include other locales; studies rarely examine these contexts or differences among locales in their analyses.

- Few studies include other leaders or school staff aside from assistant principals; there is limited research about how assistant principals interact with teachers or other leaders or how other leaders perceive assistant principals and their roles.

- Many studies did not report information about assistant principals' job experience or indicate how long it had been since principals had served as assistant principals.

- Although many studies include both female and male assistant principals, very few specifically compare the experiences of assistant principals by gender; few studies specifically and uniquely address gender as their focus.

- Very few studies focus on the experience of assistant principals from racially/ethnically marginalized groups or compare the role by race/ethnicity; more than half the studies (39) do not report the racial or ethnic backgrounds of study participants.

Figure II.4. The studies are largely conducted in the South, with far fewer studies in other regions of the United States
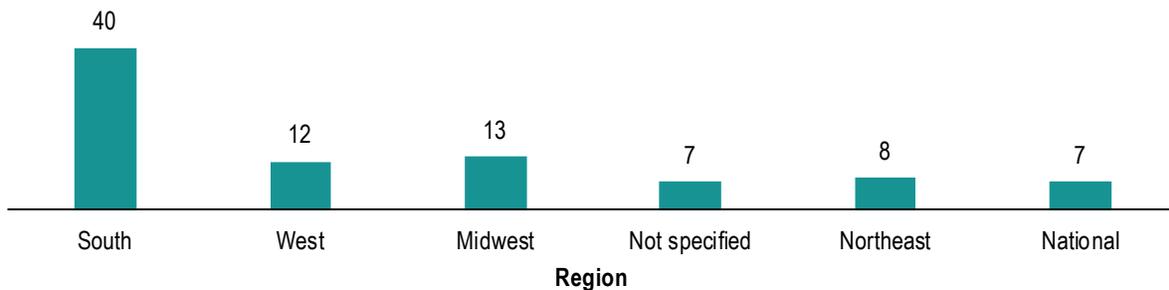
Source: Authors' calculations.

Note: The number of studies is greater than the number of coded studies. Studies that included more than one region were counted more than once. Each region includes the following states (or District of Columbia):

- **South**: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

- **West:** Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

- **Midwest:** Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin

- **Northeast**: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont

New data analyses

This section describes the data sources and analytic approaches we used to supplement the synthesis of research studies. We supplemented the synthesis of research studies with the new analyses of national and state data and a sample of assistant principal job descriptions because these data are more recent than many studies in the literature. They are also representative of larger populations than many studies (for example, the entire United States or entire states, instead of a single district or small number of schools) and follow populations across multiple years. Finally, they allowed us to address gaps in the research by examining new topics or adding depth and nuance to findings from the existing research.

Data sources

To supplement the research synthesis, we used several data sources (Table II.2). Because many of the research studies report on data from one individual state or district, we analyzed the Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey to describe national findings about schools that have assistant principals and principals that have experience as an assistant principal. We also used more detailed longitudinal data on assistant principals from two states, Tennessee and Pennsylvania—where we had ready access to the data—to provide information about whether the findings about assistant principals from other states might generalize to different contexts. Most of the existing studies are based on Southern states, such as Texas and Florida, so findings from Tennessee and Pennsylvania—one Southern State and one Northeastern state—provided additional contexts. Both Tennessee and Pennsylvania have a mix of urban and rural populations, like the entire United States, but they have higher percentages of white students and lower percentages of Latinx students than the national average (Appendix A, Table A.4). Finally, we analyzed job descriptions for assistant principals and principals that we collected from multiple districts in Tennessee and Pennsylvania to provide additional context about how districts—urban and rural—formally define the position.

Table II.2. Supplemental data sources

Data source	Key information	Sample	Years	Limitations
School and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey	Types of schools with assistant principals; types of principals with assistant principal experience; teachers' and principals' perceptions of principals' performance	Nationally representative sample of schools	Eight waves of surveys from 1987–1988 to 2015–2016	No information on characteristics of assistant principals or information about schools' achievement
Tennessee and Pennsylvania job descriptions	Assistant principal and principal job descriptions; school level; locale	Sample of job descriptions from eight districts (four in Tennessee and four in Pennsylvania)	2020	Small sample of districts from two states
Tennessee Educator Survey	Assistant principals' role (assigned tasks and time use); support from the principal; preparation for a leadership position	Educators in public schools in Tennessee	2018	One statewide survey, 55 percent response rate
Tennessee administrative data	Educators' positions; characteristics (race/ethnicity, gender, education, years of experience); career paths; evaluation ratings; school characteristics and achievement; locale	Educators in public schools in Tennessee	2002 to 2018	One state
Pennsylvania administrative data	Educators' positions; characteristics (race/ethnicity, gender, education, years of experience); career paths; school characteristics and achievement; locale	Educators in public schools in Pennsylvania	2011 to 2018	One state

Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey. We used data from eight waves of the nationally representative SASS/NTPS (spanning 1987–1988 to 2015–2016) to provide national information about the types of schools that have assistant principals and the types of principals with experience as an assistant principal. The SASS/NTPS includes surveys of schools, principals, and teachers. The school surveys allowed us to describe characteristics of schools with assistant principals, including school level (elementary or secondary schools); locale (city, suburban, town, or rural); region (Northeast, Midwest, South, or West); and student enrollment. The principal surveys allow us to describe characteristics of principals with experience as an assistant principal, including their race or ethnicity, years of experience as a principal, and the characteristics of their

school. The principal and teacher surveys also allowed us to examine the relationship between a principal's experience as an assistant principal and outcomes (as measured by teachers' perceptions of the principal's performance).

Tennessee and Pennsylvania job descriptions. To understand the required qualifications and specific duties of assistant principals and principals, we collected job descriptions from eight school districts in Pennsylvania and Tennessee during the 2019–2020 school year. These are intended to provide insights and context to the understanding of the role and are not meant to generalize beyond these districts. To capture differences by locale, in each state, we collected job descriptions from two urban and two rural districts. To select urban districts, we randomly sampled districts from the four largest cities in each state. For the rural districts, we randomly selected districts in different geographic areas of each state.[6]

We analyzed job descriptions to learn about required qualifications and roles for assistant principals and principals. We looked for differences by school level within districts as well as similarities and differences by locale (urban and rural) and within and across states. We also compared assistant principal and principal job descriptions within the same district, examining the degree of congruence between the roles, as well as how the districts described the purpose of each position.

Tennessee Educator Survey. We used data from the 2018 annual survey of educators, developed in partnership between the Tennessee Education Research Alliance and the Tennessee Department of Education. This survey included questions to assistant principals and principals in Tennessee that asks them to describe their leadership tasks and the support assistant principals received from principals. The survey asked assistant principals and principals about the time they spent on various tasks (such as discipline, observing teachers, and working with students). It also asked assistant principals about the frequency with which they received mentoring from principals and their satisfaction with their preparation programs. The response rate for assistant principals was 55 percent, and the response rate for principals was 62 percent.

Tennessee administrative data. To describe the characteristics, effectiveness, career paths, and outcomes of assistant principals, we used administrative data on all educators (teachers, assistant principals, and principals) from Tennessee public schools from 2002 to 2018. These data included educators' demographic characteristics, preparation, evaluation ratings, school assignments, and school characteristics and achievement. We used these data to describe the race/ethnicity and gender of educators in Tennessee and to examine differences by race and gender in access to the assistant principal and principal roles. The data also allowed us to examine the relationship between

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[6] Tennessee is divided into three Grand Divisions (East, Middle, and West); we selected the two rural districts from two different divisions. There is no similar formal division for Pennsylvania, so we divided the state into three regions, roughly to mirror the Tennessee divisions, and selected districts from two different regions. In both states, the small districts that were initially sampled had to be replaced in the final selection because these districts either did not have assistant principals or had not hired assistant principals or principals in so long that they did not have a job description. The urban districts in our analysis are the School District of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Public Schools in Pennsylvania and Knox County Schools and Metro Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee. The rural districts are the Juniata County School District and the Warren County School District in Pennsylvania and Benton County Schools and Washington County Schools in Tennessee.

experience or effectiveness as an assistant principal and performance as a principal (as measured by evaluation ratings and achievement).

Pennsylvania administrative data. We used administrative data on all educators (teachers, assistant principals, and principals) from Pennsylvania public schools from 2011 to 2018 to conduct similar analyses on the characteristics and career paths of assistant principals as we did for Tennessee. However, the Pennsylvania data do not include information on educators' evaluation ratings and cannot be linked to survey data on educators.

Analytic approach

We used two main approaches to analyze SASS/NTPS and state data sources:

- **Describing assistant principals' backgrounds, roles, pathway to the position, and outcomes.** We calculated descriptive statistics, such as averages and percentages, to describe a range of information about assistant principals. For analyses that are based on the same data source (such as schools in the SASS/NTPS in a given year or educators in Tennessee), we test for statistically significant differences across groups (at the 0.05 significance level).

- **Exploring relationships between assistant principals (or assistant principal experience) and outcomes.** We used regression analyses to explore relationships between the assistant principal characteristics (such as effectiveness as an assistant principal) and outcomes (such as student achievement or teachers' perceptions of school climate). For these analyses, we tested for statistically significant relationships (at the 0.05 level).

We provide more details on our approach to these analyses in Appendix A.

Approach to synthesizing evidence across research studies and other data sources

For this report, we draw on both the research studies and new data analyses to address each of the study topics (Table II.3).

Table II.3. Data sources by topic

Topic	Research studies	SASS/NTPS	Tennessee and Pennsylvania job descriptions	Tennessee Educator Survey	Tennessee administrative data	Pennsylvania administrative data
Prevalence	X	X				
Role	X		X	X		
Pathway	X			X	X	X
Pathway for educators of color and women	X	X			X	X
Outcomes	X	X			X	X

Within each topic, we organize findings according to emergent themes and identify the source of the evidence presented using the icons in Box II.3. We state the number of studies for each topic and note if studies have characteristics that suggest that the findings may be less generalizable, such as being based on only one district or based on surveys with low response rates. For secondary data, we discuss consistency of findings across states or years of data. For all sources of evidence, we review alignment and discordance of research findings, and we also discuss the strength and limitations of the evidence. Despite the substantial variation across the research studies and new analyses, they begin to paint a picture of the assistant principal role. We use the following terms to characterize the literature:

- **Limited evidence:** a few studies or analyses on a topic

- **Suggestive evidence:** a few studies or analyses report similar findings with no contrary evidence

- **Mixed/inconsistent evidence:** studies or analyses report different, divergent, or contrary findings

- **Consistent evidence:** multiple studies or analyses report similar findings with no contrary evidence

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Box II.3. Data sources are noted with icons

Research studies

Job descriptions

SASS/NTPS

Tennessee Educator Survey or administrative data

Pennsylvania administrative data

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III. HOW PREVALENT ARE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS? WHICH PRINCIPALS TEND TO HAVE EXPERIENCE AS AN ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL?

To understand the role of assistant principals and explore their pathway to the principalship, we first examine the context of the assistant principalship. How common are assistant principals? Is experience as an assistant principal becoming more common among principals? Our analyses and synthesis of existing research highlight trends among assistant principals that provide important background information for understanding the assistant principal role. First, over time, assistant principals have become more common, with elementary schools experiencing a dramatic increase in the prevalence of assistant principals over the last 25 years (authors' calculations and Fuller et al., 2018). Second, serving as an assistant principal has become a more common stepping-stone to the principalship in recent years (authors' calculations; Fuller et al., 2018; Hitt & Player, 2018; Protheroe, 2008).

In this chapter, we describe evidence about these trends in the assistant principal role over the last 25 years, including information about the types of schools in which assistant principals work and the characteristics of principals who have experience as an assistant principal. To provide a comprehensive national description of the types of schools with assistant principals and the characteristics of principals with experience as an assistant principal, we largely draw upon our analyses of data from the SASS/NTPS nationally representative surveys. These data provide strong evidence about national trends. We supplement these findings with information from research studies. The studies and data in this chapter are summarized in Box III.1.

> **Box III.1. Studies and data on prevalence of assistant principals and assistant principal experience among principals**
>
> **_Eight coded studies_**
> **Publication type**
> - 3 studies in peer-reviewed journals
> - 5 unpublished reports
>
> **Methodology**
> - 7 quantitative studies (4 descriptive, 3 correlational)
> - 1 mixed methods study
>
> **_Data_**
> **National data**
> - Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey (1987–1988 through 2015–2016)

Assistant principals are increasingly common in the United States

Over the last 25 years, the percentage of public schools nationally with an assistant principal has increased overall and at all school levels. Analyses of SASS/NTPS show that in 1990–1991, about one-third of all U.S. public schools had at least one full-time assistant principal, but more than half of these schools had an assistant principal by 2015–2016 (Figure III.1).[7] Most of the rise in the overall percentages of schools with assistant principals is

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[7] To understand trends for educators who predominantly work in the assistant principal role, this chapter only counts the numbers of assistant principals in the SASS/NTPS that worked full time. It is not clear how much time part-time assistant principals dedicate to the role versus other responsibilities, such as teaching. Less than 8 percent of schools in

explained by a dramatic increase in the percentage of elementary schools with assistant principals. About one-quarter of elementary schools had an assistant principal in 1990–1991, compared with more than half of elementary schools in 2015–2016.[8] Secondary schools (which include middle schools and high schools) had the highest percentages of schools with an assistant principal over the entire time period (more than 60 percent), and this percentage only rose slightly between 1990–1991 and 2015–2016. The percentage of mixed level schools (schools that have both elementary and secondary levels, such as K–12 schools) with an assistant principal varied over this period, ending up only slightly above the 1990–1991 level by 2015–2016.[9] As described below, the growth in the percentage of elementary schools with assistant principals is not fully explained by the increase in the size of elementary schools over this period.

Figure III.1. Nationally, the percentage of schools with assistant principals has increased over the past 25 years

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2007–2008, 2011–2012, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,970 in 1990–1991 to 5,770 in 2015–2016. Percentage represents schools that have at least one full-time assistant principal. Estimates are nationally representative. Mixed level schools have both elementary and secondary levels, such as K–12 schools.

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any year have only part-time assistant principals, so findings that count both full-time and part-time assistant principals were similar (see Appendix B, Figure B.1).

[8] Consistent with the SASS/NTPS data, national surveys of members of the National Association of Elementary School Principals—a professional organization that serves elementary and middle school principals—also indicate that the percentages of elementary schools with assistant principals has increased over time (Fuller et al., 2018).

[9] These schools are also known as "combined schools."

The percentage of schools in the United States with multiple assistant principals has also grown, but most schools with assistant principals only have one. According to the SASS/NTPS, between 1990–1991 and 2015–2016, there were increases in the percentages of U.S. schools with multiple assistant principals (from 11 percent to 17 percent of schools), though growth differed across school levels (Figure III.2). Elementary schools experienced the largest increase in the percentages of schools with one assistant principal (from 21 to 40 percent) with smaller increases for schools with two or more assistant principals. In contrast, secondary schools experienced the most growth in the percentage of schools with at least three assistant principals (from 15 to 22 percent), and little to no growth in the percentages of schools with one or two assistant principals.

In all years, multiple assistant principals are most common in secondary schools. In 2015–2016, 39 percent of secondary schools had two or more assistant principals, compared with 11 percent of elementary schools that had two or more assistant principals.

Figure III.2. Nationally, the percentage of schools with multiple assistant principals has grown over time, although most schools with assistant principals only have one
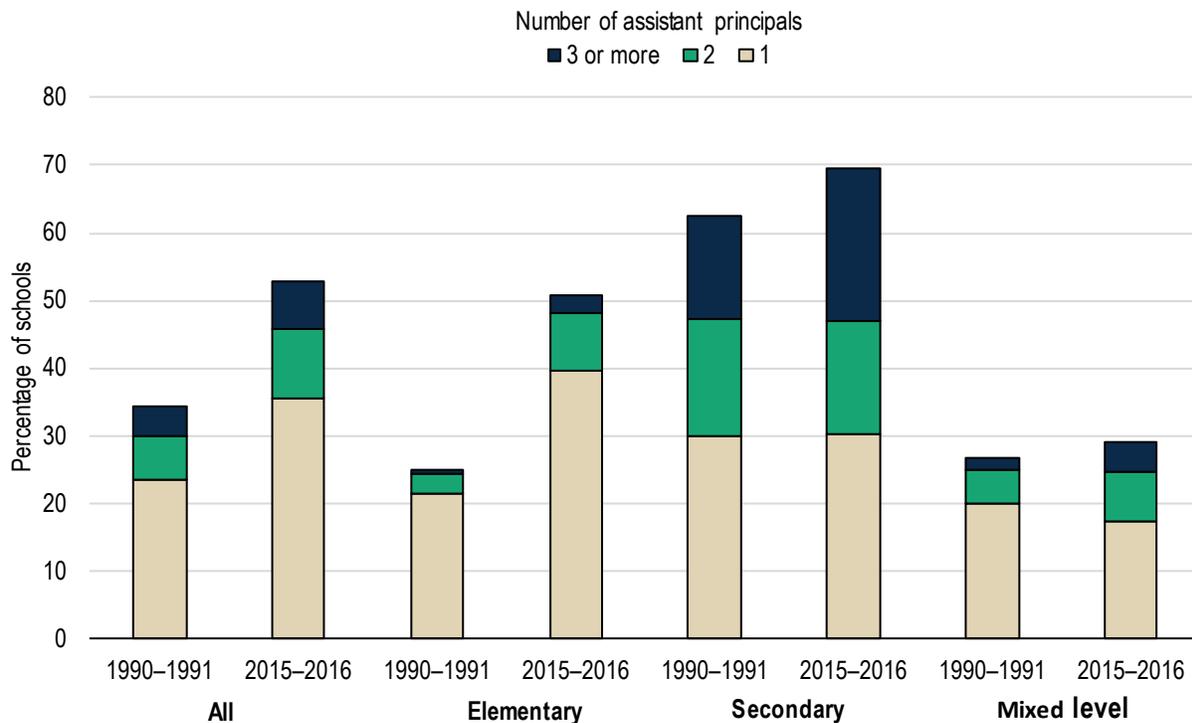
Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1991–1990 and 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,970 in 1990–1991 to 5,770 in 2015–2016. Percentage represents schools with each number of full-time assistant principals. Estimates are nationally representative. Mixed level schools have both elementary and secondary levels, such as K–12 schools.

The number of assistant principals per school has grown faster than the number of students. Between 1990–1991 and 2015–2016, the average number of students increased in elementary schools (from 447 to 495 students) and secondary schools (from 694 to 782 students). However, the assistant principal to student ratios also increased over this time period, meaning that the number of assistant principals per school rose faster than the number of students. In elementary schools, the assistant principal to student ratio increased from 0.67 to 1.31 assistant principals per 1,000 students. For secondary schools, the assistant principal to student ratio rose from 1.74 to 1.94 per 1,000 students.

The increases in the percentages of schools with one or more assistant principals over the last 25 years, combined with increasing numbers of public schools over this period, indicate that the number of assistant principals has been growing. There are no studies or data that provide the exact numbers of assistant principals in the United States. But based on our calculations from the SASS/NTPS and published numbers of public schools in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2019a), we estimate that between 1990–1991 and 2015–2016, the number of assistant principals in the United States increased from 43,960 to 80,590.[10] Our estimates suggest that the number of assistant principals in public schools has grown nearly six times as quickly as the number of principals, which grew from 78,890 to 90,400 over the same time period (Fiore & Cutin, 1997; Taie & Goldring, 2017). This suggests that there are now about eight assistant principals for every nine principals in the United States.

Larger schools have more assistant principals. According to the NTPS, in 2015–2016, the average number of assistant principals per school was related to the number of students enrolled (Figure III.3). In this year, secondary schools had more students, on average, than elementary schools (782 students for secondary schools versus 495 students for elementary schools). However, secondary schools had more assistant principals than similarly sized elementary schools. For example, secondary schools with 750 to 999 students had an average of 1.8 assistant principals, compared with 1.3 for elementary schools with 750 to 999 students. A national survey of members of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) also found that assistant principals were more common in larger schools (Fuller et al., 2018). Assistant principals may be more common in larger schools because states and districts often allocate assistant principals based on student enrollment (Box III.2).

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[10] To obtain these estimates, we multiplied the number of public schools in the United States in each year (U.S. Department of Education, 2019a) by the average number of assistant principals per school, which we calculated from the SASS/NTPS.

Figure III.3. Schools with larger student enrollments have more assistant principals

Elementary schools

Secondary schools

Mixed level schools
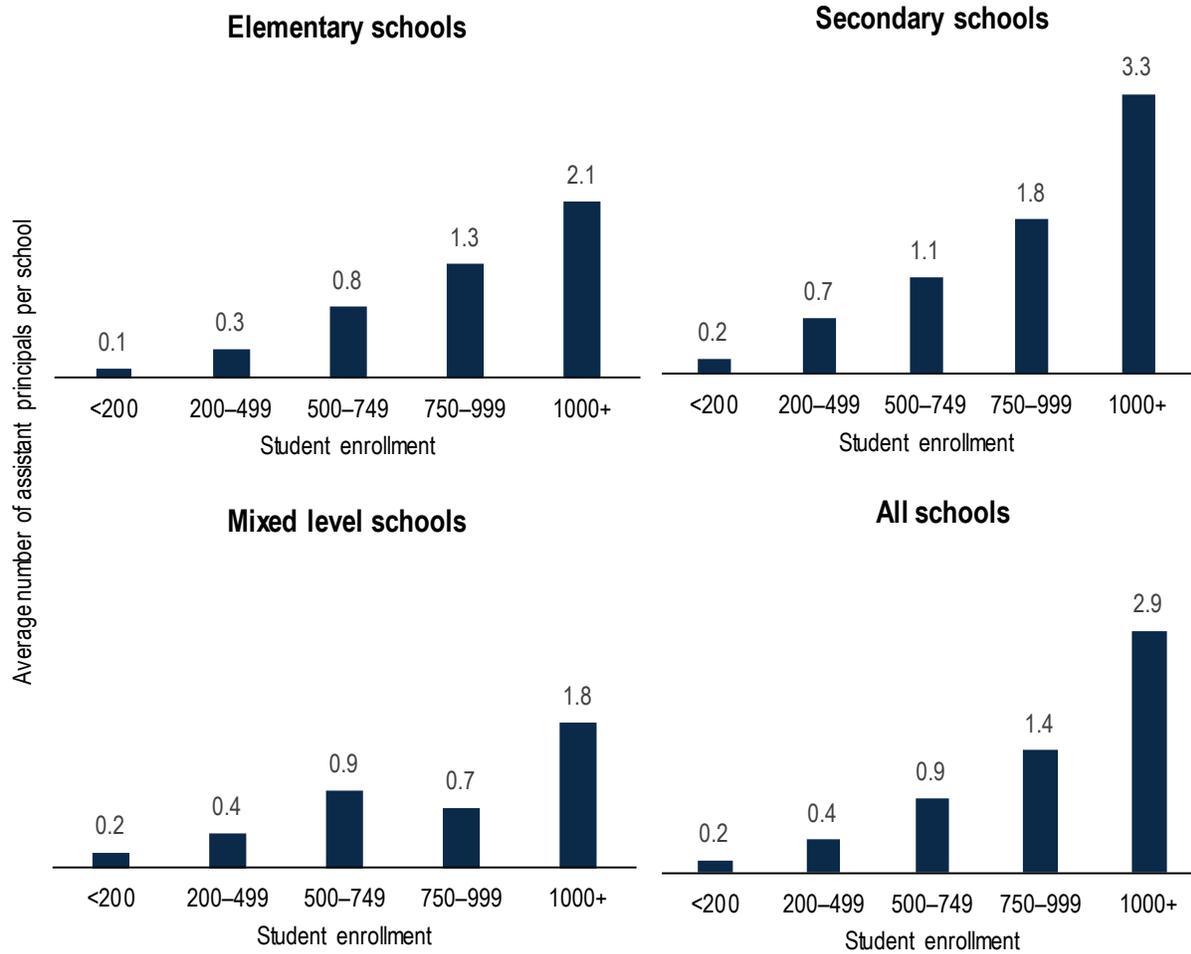
All schools

Source: National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools is 3,470 for elementary schools, 1,490 for secondary schools, 810 for mixed level schools, and 5,770 for all schools. Estimates are nationally representative. Mixed level schools have both elementary and secondary levels, such as K–12 schools.

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Box III.2. How are assistant principals allocated to schools?

States and districts differ in how they allocate assistant principals to schools. Surveys of members of the National Association of Elementary School Principals in 2008 and 2018 indicated that student enrollment was, by far, the most common criteria used to allocate assistant principals to schools (Fuller et al., 2018; Protheroe, 2008). However, these surveys also suggested that the percentage of districts that allocate assistant principals based on student enrollment decreased slightly over time from 51 to 49 percent (Fuller et al., 2018; Protheroe, 2008). Some districts allocated assistant principals based on student characteristics (such as the percentage of students in poverty or who are English language learners) or student achievement (Fuller et al., 2018). Others assigned assistant principals to all elementary or intermediate schools, based on the number of staff members in the school or to work with specific programs (Protheroe, 2008).

Information from two states, Pennsylvania and Tennessee—the states that provided administrative data for this report—provided additional context about how assistant principals were allocated to schools. In Pennsylvania, decisions about allocating assistant principals are left up to individual school districts (Pennsylvania Department of Education, personal communication, February 24, 2020). In Tennessee, assistant principals are allocated using a formula based on student enrollment and school level. For example, Tennessee allocates one assistant principal to elementary schools with 880 to 1,099 students and secondary schools with 650 to 999 students (Tennessee Department of Education, 2014, 2019).

No studies examine whether the most effective assistant principals are placed in the schools where they are most needed. This is, in part, due to limited measures of assistant principals' effectiveness.

The ratios of assistant principals to students have grown relatively equally in cities, suburbs, and towns but have declined recently in rural areas. A change in how the SASS/NTPS defined and classified locales across years complicates comparisons over time.[11] However, between 1990–1991 and 2007–2008, the assistant principal to student ratios increased in all three types of locales—large/midsized cities, urban fringe, and small town/rural areas (Figure III.4). Between 2011–2012 and 2015–2016, the assistant principal to student ratios increased in cities, suburbs, and towns but declined in rural areas. More populous areas had higher assistant principal to student ratios in all years. In 2015–2016, for every 1,000 students, cities had 1.8 assistant principals, compared with 1.5 for suburbs, 1.4 for towns, and 1.2 for rural areas.

Comparisons of assistant principal to student ratios help to account for the fact that schools in cities and suburbs are larger than those in towns and rural areas. Consistent with differences in school size, cities and suburbs had higher percentages of schools with assistant principals than those in towns and rural areas. In 2015–2016, more than 60 percent of schools in cities and suburbs had assistant principals, compared with 47 percent of schools in towns and 35 percent of schools in rural areas (Appendix B, Figure B.2).

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[11] The 2015–2016 NTPS and 2011–2012 SASS classified locales into four types (city, suburban, town, and rural), but earlier years of SASS classified locales into three types (large/midsized city, urban fringe, and small town/rural). See Appendix A for definitions of locales.

Figure III.4. Ratios of assistant principals to students have grown relatively equally in cities, suburbs, and towns but declined recently in rural areas
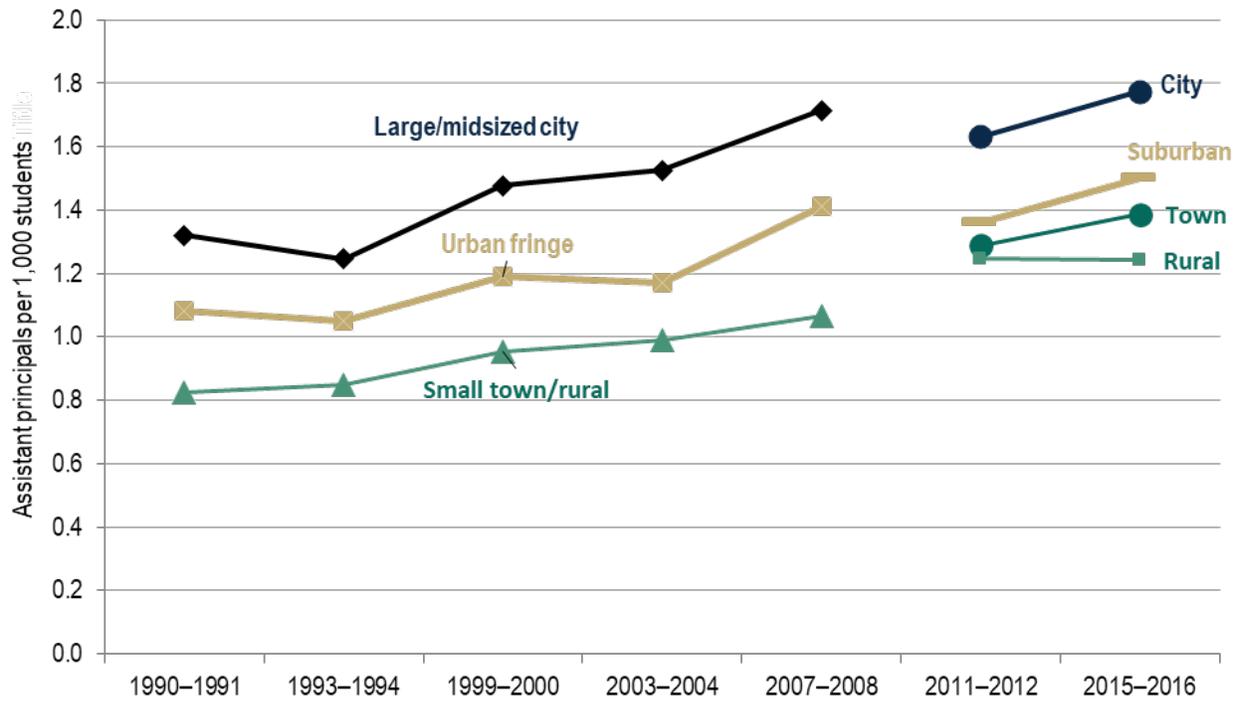
Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2007–2008, 2011–2012, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,970 in 1990–1991 to 5,770 in 2015–2016. Percentage represents schools that have at least one full-time assistant principal. Estimates are nationally representative. The SASS/NTPS used three locale classifications prior to 2007–2008 and four classifications starting in 2011–2012.

Schools in the South have higher ratios of assistant principals to students than do schools in other regions. According to the SASS/NTPS, ratios of assistant principals to students grew in all regions over the last 25 years (Figure III.5). The South has the largest schools, so the South also had the highest percentage of schools with assistant principals. In 2015–2016, 70 percent of schools in the South had at least one assistant principal, compared with less than 55 percent of the schools in the Northeast, West, and Midwest (see Appendix B, Figure B.3).

Figure III.5. Schools in the South have higher assistant principal to student ratios than schools in other regions
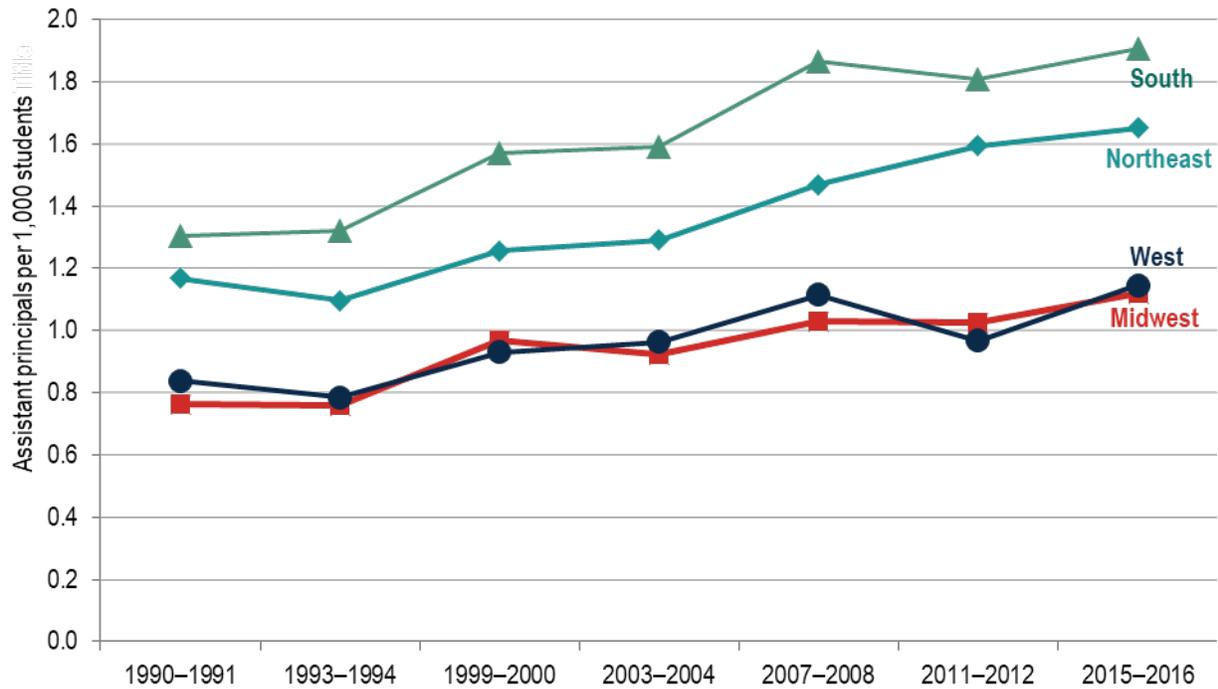
Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2007–2008, 2011–2012, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,970 in 1990–1991 to 5,770 in 2015–2016. Percentage represents schools that have at least one full-time assistant principal. Estimates are nationally representative.

Schools with assistant principals have more students of color than schools without assistant principals. According to the NTPS, in 2015–2016, schools with an assistant principal had higher percentages of Latinx and Black students and students of races other than white than schools without an assistant principal (Table III.1). National differences in the racial and ethnic composition of schools with and without assistant principals generally remained statistically significant, even after accounting for differences between the two groups of schools in schools' locales, regions, levels, student enrollment, and the percentages of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch (not shown). No research explains the reason for these patterns.

Table III.1. Schools with assistant principals have higher percentages of students of color than schools without assistant principals

Characteristic (percentages unless otherwise indicated)	Averages for schools	
	Assistant principal	No assistant principal
Student race/ethnicity		
Latinx, any race	25*	19
White, non-Latinx	47*	61
Black, non-Latinx	19*	11
Other race, non-Latinx	9*	10
Individualized education plan	13	14
Free or reduced-price lunch	55	55
Number of schools	3,200–3,450	2,140–2,320

Source: National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2015–2016.

Note: Estimates are nationally representative. There were no data available on the percentages of students who are limited English proficient or English language learners in 2015–2016.

* Difference between schools with an assistant principal and schools without an assistant principal is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The assistant principal role is an increasingly common stepping-stone to the principalship

Over the past 25 years, the percentage of principals who have experience as an assistant principal has increased. Analyses of the SASS/NTPS show that in 1987–1988, about half of principals in all U.S. public schools had experience as assistant principals, but more than three-quarters of principals had this experience by 2015–2016 (Figure III.6). Experience as an assistant principal has also become more common for principals of elementary schools, secondary schools, and mixed level schools over this time period. However, in all years, principals of secondary schools were more likely to have experience as an assistant principal than were principals of elementary schools or mixed level schools. Consistent with our findings from the SASS/NTPS, one study that examined two years of SASS data and two studies of national surveys of members of the NAESP also found that the percentages of principals with assistant principal experience generally increased over time (Fuller et al., 2018; Hitt & Player, 2018; Protheroe, 2008). Studies of North Carolina, Florida, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and six other large districts around the United States also found that high percentages of principals had assistant principal experience (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Folsom et al., 2015; Loeb et al., 2010; Osbourne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017; Turnbull et al., 2016).[12] However, these percentages varied across contexts. For instance, Turnbull et al. (2016) found that the percentage of principals with assistant principal experience ranged from 68 percent in New York City to 98 percent in Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida. Furthermore, principals may be more likely to have assistant principal experience from the same school level. Members of NAESP who worked in elementary

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[12] The six large districts were implementing The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative.

schools were about twice as likely to report having assistant principal experience in elementary schools than in middle schools or high schools (Fuller et al., 2018).

The increase in the percentages of principals with assistant principal experience over the last 25 years, combined with overall increases in the number of principals, implies that the number of principals with assistant principal experience grew over this time period. Based on our calculations from the SASS/NTPS and published numbers on principals, we estimate that between 1987–1988 and 2015–2016, the numbers of principals with assistant principal experience grew from 39,100 to 69,600.

Figure III.6. The percentage of principals with experience as an assistant principal has increased over the past 25 years
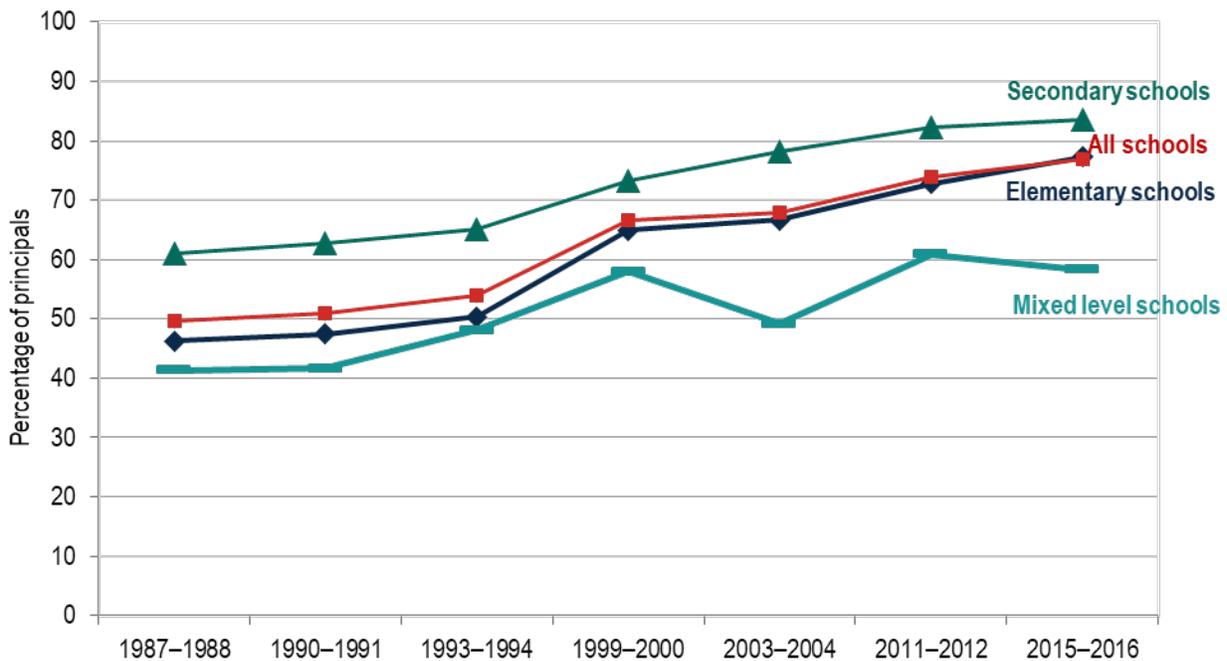
Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1987–1988, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2007–2008, 2011–2012, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,520 in 1987–1988 to 5,710 in 2015–2016. Percentage reflects whether the individual held the position of assistant principal or program director before becoming a principal. Estimates are nationally representative. Data on whether principals had experience as an assistant principal were not available in the 2007–2008 Schools and Staffing Survey. Mixed level schools have both elementary and secondary levels, such as K–12 schools.

Principals with assistant principal experience are more likely than other principals to work in cities, suburbs, the South, larger schools, and schools with higher percentages of students of color. According to the SASS/NTPS, principals with assistant principal experience were most likely to work in the same types of schools where assistant principals were most common (see Appendix B, Table B.1). Nationally, principals with assistant principal experience were just as likely as other principals to work in schools with lower percentages of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. In Miami-Dade County Public

Schools, a study found that schools with higher concentrations of students of color, students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and students with lower test scores were more likely to have principal vacancies filled by an assistant principal from another school (instead of a principal from another school) than were other schools (Loeb et al., 2010).

Key takeaways

Key takeaways on the prevalence of assistant principals include the following:

- **The number of assistant principals in the United States is growing, as is the number of principals with experience as an assistant principal.** The growth in the number of assistant principals and the number of principals with assistant principal experience suggests the assistant principal role may be an increasingly important way to support school leadership and prepare future principals. Much of this growth is explained by an increase in the percentage of elementary schools with assistant principals but is not fully explained by the increase in the size of elementary schools over this period.

- **Assistant principals and principals who have experience as assistant principals are most common in urban schools, schools in the South, and schools serving higher percentages of students of color.** These findings suggest that the assistant principal role may be a crucial lever for improving equitable outcomes for students, particularly in these types of schools.

Questions for future research

- **Why are the numbers of assistant principals increasing? Will the numbers continue to increase?** The number of assistant principals has grown faster than increases in school size, and there is no research on why. Possible explanations include policy changes that have influenced leadership roles, such as teacher evaluation policies that demand more time and attention for classroom observation and teacher evaluation activities. The expanding and increasingly complex role of principals, as evidenced in national educational leadership standards, and increased attention on the need for principals to serve as instructional leaders, might have resulted in more leadership positions in schools.

- **How and why are assistant principals allocated to schools? Are effective assistant principals equitably allocated to schools?** Evidence about how assistant principals are assigned to schools is limited, and no evidence exists on whether the most effective principals are assigned to the schools where they are needed most. As the principal role becomes more complex and demanding, and schools face challenges in retaining teachers and meeting the needs of all students, research can help illuminate whether assistant principals are in the schools with the greatest needs. Allocating assistant principals by school size may be an outdated and misguided policy. Further research is needed to investigate these questions in different contexts, such as urban and rural school districts, as well as on a national scale.

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IV. WHAT ARE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP ROLES?

Assistant principal roles are highly varied and largely defined by principals. Prior studies almost always note that assistant principals' roles are primarily focused on student discipline and other administrative tasks (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Hausman et al., 2002; Ricciardi & Petrosko, 2001; VanTuyle, 2018). Consequently, assistant principals might have limited exposure to instructional leadership responsibilities. This limited exposure to instructional leadership raises concerns that many assistant principals may not be well prepared for the principalship, given that instructional leadership is a key responsibility of effective principals (Fuller et al., 2018; Grissom et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002).

In this chapter, we explore the roles of assistant principals. To understand how the expectations for the assistant principal role differ from those for principals, we first describe professional standards for assistant principals. We also analyze a sample of assistant principal and principal job descriptions from eight districts to provide insights and context to the research (though these are not meant to generalize to other states or districts.) We then present the research on leadership tasks and responsibilities of assistant principals. We compare how assistant principals and principals spend their time on various leadership tasks, and we examine how assistant principals' background characteristics may influence leadership tasks. In this chapter, we synthesize research studies and analyze data from the Tennessee Educator Survey. Finally, we summarize the scant research on how assistant principals are evaluated in their roles and how their evaluations differ from evaluations of principals. The studies and data described in this chapter are summarized in Box IV.1.

> **Box IV.1. Studies and data on the assistant principal role**
>
> *Thirty-five coded studies*
>
> **Publication type**
> - 30 studies in peer-reviewed journals
> - 5 unpublished reports
>
> **Methodology**
> - 19 qualitative studies (11 case studies, 6 interview studies, 2 other)
> - 14 quantitative studies (5 descriptive, 7 correlational, 2 simulated experiments)
> - 2 mixed methods studies
>
> *Data*
>
> **Tennessee data**
> - Tennessee Educator Survey data (2017–2018)
> - Tennessee administrative data (2011–2012)
>
> **Assistant principal and principal job descriptions**
> - 4 Pennsylvania districts
> - 4 Tennessee districts

In this chapter, we do not distinguish between different types of assistant principals—such as assistant principal for instruction or assistant principal for administration—who could potentially have different roles. The research studies and assistant principal job descriptions that we reviewed do not distinguish between or discuss assistant principals with different titles or labels; they use the term *assistant principal.* Web searches of open positions in 103 districts confirm that most districts used the term *assistant principal* in their job postings, but a few used other terms, such as vice

principal or assistant principal – student services/student affairs (Figure IV.1). Assistant principals with more specialized job titles were more common in large districts.

Figure IV.1. Most districts use the term *assistant principal* in their job postings
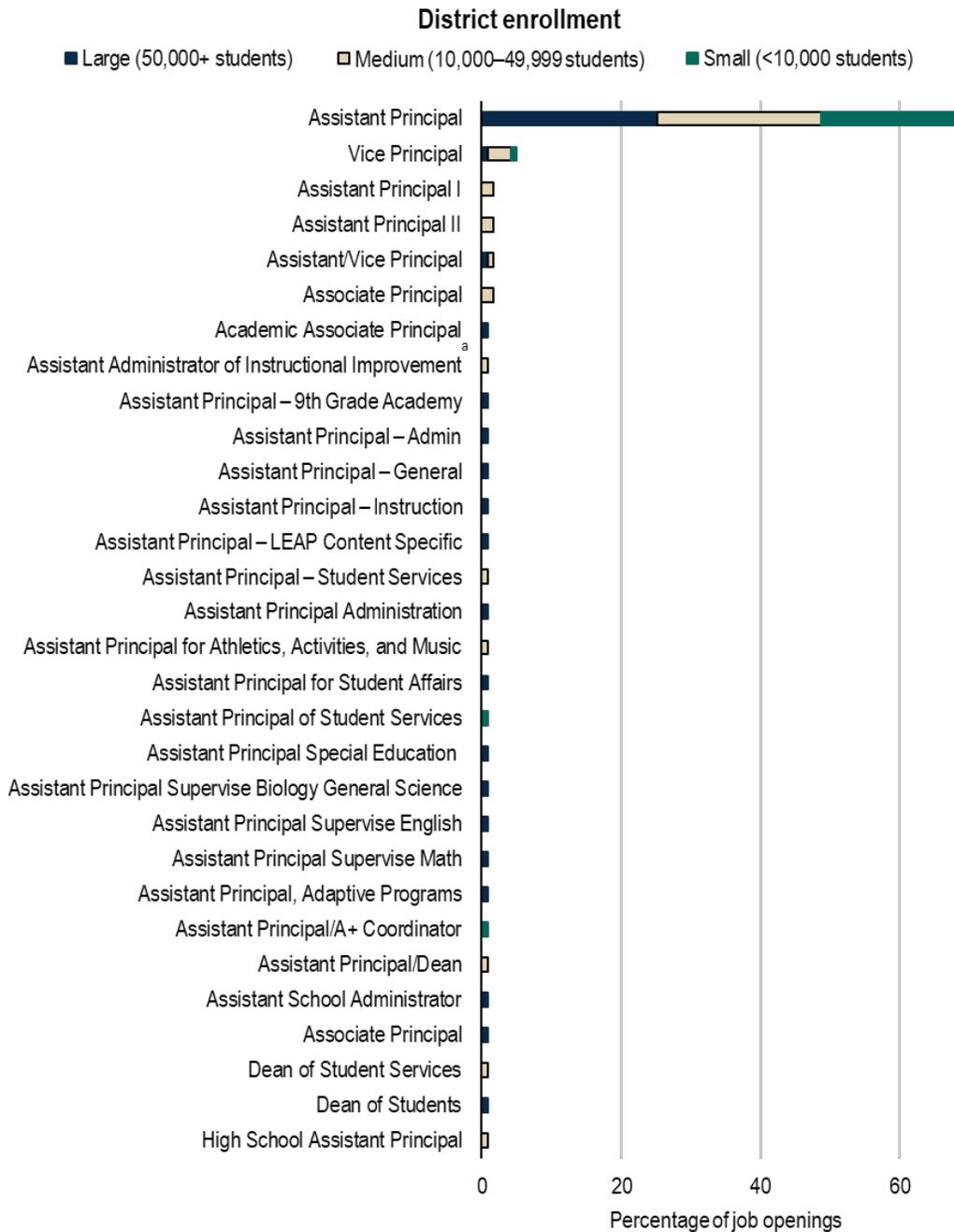
Source: Web searches of districts' job postings.

Note: The numbers of job postings and districts are as follows: 119 total job postings from 103 total districts, 48 job postings from 37 large districts; 45 job postings from 40 medium districts, and 26 job postings from 26 small districts.

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Professional standards do not distinguish between assistant principal and principal roles

Most states and districts do not have separate professional standards for assistant principals and principals. Professional standards for educational leaders, such as those developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, are designed to apply to both principals and assistant principals. Similarly, the evaluation of the Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative noted that standards for assistant principals were the same as those for principals in five out of six large districts, and the sixth district had not defined standards for assistant principals. In the absence of standards for assistant principals, there is a lack of clarity for the role and limited transparency about the types of experience needed to move to the principalship (Turnbull et al., 2015). No research studies explore unique and dedicated standards for assistant principals.

Job descriptions define the assistant principal role as one that supports the principal

Assistant principals' job descriptions list similar responsibilities as those of principals and note that the assistant principal supports the principal. Job descriptions shed light on districts' expectations for the role and how they define the role. In the eight districts we reviewed, the primary difference between assistant principals' and principals' job descriptions was that assistant principals' job descriptions specifically note that they assist, help, work jointly with, and support principals, whereas principals oversee, lead, and direct the myriad duties and responsibilities of the job (see Figure IV.2 for an example of job descriptions from Knox County Schools in Tennessee).

Figure IV.2. Job descriptions frame the assistant principal role to support the principal, whereas principals are the school leaders

Assistant principals	Principals
The assistant principal is responsible for supporting the principal in conducting all academic programs as well as the business and daily operations of the school. The assistant principal supports the implementation of the policies defined by the Knox County Board of Education and upholds the Knox County Schools' standards and values at all times. The assistant principal will help achieve school alignment with the district's strategic plan, *"Excellence for All Children."* The assistant principal may serve as the principal designee in his or her absence. The assistant principal reports to the appropriate principal, as assigned.	**The principal** will report to the superintendent and use leadership, supervisory, administrative and management skills to promote the educational development of each student in compliance with all applicable rules, regulations, and policies of Knox County Schools. He or she will serve as the instructional leader of the school, overseeing curriculum implementation and ensuring teachers are equipped with the necessary resources to be highly effective in their practice. The principal will supervise all professional, paraprofessional, administrative, and nonprofessional personnel at the school and assist with interviewing, training, assigning, and evaluating of the staff. He or she will facilitate, with all school stakeholders, the creation and implementation of a shared vision of excellence for every student. The principal will also develop an operational system and structure that are aligned to the vision and mission of the Knox County School System.

Source: Knox County Schools, Tennessee, 2019–2020.

The official job descriptions for both assistant principals and principals typically offered a long list of responsibilities falling within three main domains—education management and administration, student discipline, and instructional leadership (see Figure IV.3). Across school levels, all of the assistant principal job descriptions included student discipline as a primary responsibility. The

principal job descriptions also mentioned school discipline. The job descriptions also did not usually define different responsibilities for leaders by school levels. None of the districts had job descriptions for specific types of assistant principals or assistant principals with different names (such as assistant principal for instruction or administration).

Figure IV.3. Essential functions of the assistant principal and principal positions have some similarities

Assistant principals	Principals
Instructional leadership domain	
- Assist in instructional leadership - Assist in the supervision and evaluation of staff - Assist in planning the master schedule - Assist in planning and conducting school programs and projects - Help evaluate school policies, programs, and plans	- Serve as instructional leader of the school - Provide educational leadership to the school and community served - Observe teaching methods and examine learning materials to evaluate and standardize curricula and teaching techniques, and to determine areas where improvement is needed - Collaborate with teachers to develop and maintain curriculum standards, develop mission statements, and set performance goals and objectives - Train, supervise, and evaluate primary and supplemental staff - Evaluate curricula, teaching methods, and programs to determine their effectiveness, efficiency, and utilization and to ensure that school activities comply with federal, state, and local regulations - Plan and lead professional development activities for teachers and support staff
Education management and administration domain	
- Oversee general student safety and welfare programs - Enforce school and district rules and regulations - Assist in the conduct of student extracurricular and co-curricular programs - Help orient new staff members - Assist with budget development and implementation - Help oversee the transportation program - Assist with attendance area administrative responsibilities - Perform the responsibilities of the principal in his or her absence - Perform other duties, as assigned by the principal, assistant superintendent, and/or the superintendent of schools	- Communicate with people outside the district, representing the district to the public and other external sources by developing and delivering a school-based public relations program - Develop and administer the approved building budget - Assist with the transportation program to ensure student safety and order - Work with other administrators in the attendance area to develop local team representation
Student discipline domain	
Assist in the resolution of disciplinary and other special problems	- Enforce discipline and attendance rules - Confer with parents and staff to discuss educational activities, policies, and student behavioral or learning problems - Counsel and provide guidance to students regarding personal, academic, vocational, or behavioral issues

Source: Warren County School District, Pennsylvania, 2019–2020.

The job descriptions do not explicitly describe the assistant principal role as preparation for the principalship or a discrete career position. Only one of the assistant principal job descriptions, for a rural district in Pennsylvania, specifically noted that the assistant principal role could be a stepping-stone to the principalship, stating the assistant principal position is "generally seen as preparatory to for [*sic*] a principal position but can be a career position." Principals were assistant principals' direct supervisors, but the principal job descriptions we reviewed did not specifically mention principals' responsibilities in preparing or mentoring assistant principals for the principalship or supporting assistant principals in the assistant principal role. Principal job descriptions did not specifically mention assistant principals beyond principals' general responsibility of training, supervising, or evaluating staff.

Assistant principals undertake a mix of leadership tasks

Assistant principals undertake tasks that include student discipline, instructional leadership, and management, but the allocation of time varies across the specific tasks. The often-cited notion that assistant principals spend most of their time on student discipline is only somewhat supported by studies published since 2000. The role is much more complex and nuanced than one framed as either focused on instructional leadership or discipline. No clear evidence from research studies suggested that assistant principals only served in one role; rather, assistant principals engaged in discipline, management, and instructional leadership work (Table IV.1). One earlier study by Ricciardi and Petrosko (2001) surveyed 56 assistant principals participating in an internship-type preparation program in Kentucky. It found that 95 percent of assistant principals in the program reported that discipline and student management took more than 20 percent of their time. Another study reported that 19 percent of assistant principals reported spending 20 hours or more on student discipline (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). In contrast, Searby et al. (2017) found that 62 percent of assistant principals reported that more than 50 percent of their work responsibilities were in the areas of instructional leadership. Not surprisingly, assistant principals who perceived themselves to be better at a given domain of leadership were more likely to report spending more time engaging in that area of practice (Morgan, 2018).

The role is much more complex and nuanced than one framed as either focused on instructional leadership or discipline. No clear evidence from research studies suggested that assistant principals only served in one role; rather, assistant principals engaged in discipline, management, and instructional leadership work.

Table IV.1. Several studies show that assistant principals have multiple leadership roles, including discipline and instructional leadership

Study author	Year	Discipline	Instructional leadership	Management
Ricciardi and Petrosko	2001	95% reported student discipline as 1st, 2nd, or 3rd priority.	57% reported nondisciplinary interactions with students; 39% supervision and contact with staff; 11% curriculum as a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd priority.	21% reported duties assigned by central office; 20% safety and security issues; 22% parents and community contacts as 1st, 2nd, or 3rd priority.
DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran	2003	19% spent 20 hours or more on student discipline.[a]	3% spent 20 hours or more in instructional leadership.	11% spent 20 hours or more on paperwork; 2% spent 20 hours or more on meetings with parents.
Searby et al.	2017	Not analyzed.	62% reported that more than 50 percent of their work responsibilities were in instructional leadership.	Not analyzed.
Sun and Shoho	2017	Resolving student behavioral issues rated 7th out of top 10 school activities contributing to school success.	Instructional leadership activities rated as top 5 activities important for school success (such as observing teaching, using data).	Management duties were not rated in the top 10 school activities contributing to school success; highest rated management activity was responding to parents' inquiries (rated 16 out of 56).
VanTuyle	2018	11 out 17 assistant principals identified discipline as primary responsibility.	Most identified evaluation of teacher performance and other areas of instructional leadership as significant responsibilities.	Not analyzed.

[a] Authors did not specify the timeframe for the 20 hours, though we assumed it was a week.

Differences in study results about how assistant principals spend their time can reflect differences in how researchers define specific types of leadership tasks, as well how they ask about or define time allocation. In addition, study results can also reflect differences in study time periods, where the expectations for school leadership have changed from management to instructional leadership. For example, the most recent studies (Searby et al., 2017; Sun & Shoho, 2017; VanTuyle, 2018) found a significant emphasis on instructional leadership for the assistant principal role, consistent with the recent increased focus on instructional leadership required of principals as well. Similarly, principals themselves have highly varied allocation of time across similar tasks, management, students, and instructional leadership (Goldring et al., 2020).

Research also indicates that specific roles that assistant principals undertake are most likely influenced by the leadership tasks distributed to them by their principals (Grenda & Hackmann, 2014; Malin & Hackmann, 2017). For example, in one study, the implementation of a distributed leadership model in middle schools moved assistant principals toward more managerial tasks so that principals could be more enmeshed in the work of instruction (Grenda & Hackmann, 2014).

Another study documented how distributed leadership engaged assistant principals in instructional leadership work (Portin et al., 2009). Specifically, this study described how principals designated instructional leadership teams consisting of assistant principals and teacher leaders to be responsible for the bulk of instructional leadership activities, including classroom walkthroughs, data use, modeling classroom teaching, and teacher support and professional development. In another example, a school developed an academy model, housing several different academies in the school; the assistant principal became the academy principal, with full responsibility for the academy, including teacher professional development (Malin & Hackmann, 2017). This variation in tasks is also consistent with the job descriptions, which noted that assistant principals undertake a wide array of tasks as assigned by their principals.

There is limited evidence that assistant principals spend more time on student discipline than principals do. In Virginia, DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) found that assistant principals spent more time than principals on school discipline, but they spent less time than principals on instructional leadership. In this study, 19 percent of assistant principals spent 20 or more hours per week on school discipline, compared with only 4 percent of principals; 3 percent of assistant principals spent 20 hours or more per week on instructional leadership, compared to 9 percent of principals. However, this study had low response rates (38 percent for principals and assistant principals combined), so its findings may not represent the true differences. This study is also from 2003, and the principal and assistant principal roles have likely changed since then.

Our analyses of 2018 survey data from Tennessee confirmed that assistant principals spent more time on school discipline than principals, but they spent just as much time on instructional leadership. More specifically, assistant principals in Tennessee spent almost twice as much time as principals on discipline in a typical week (27 percent of their time compared to 14 percent for principals) and only slightly less time on instructional roles, such as observing instruction (18 percent for assistant principals compared to 20 percent for principals; Figure IV.4). The Tennessee context may be unique in that the state has a strong focus on teacher observations and evaluation. Both sets of research findings from Tennessee and Virginia point out the substantial variation and overlap across assistant principal and principal roles.

Figure IV.4. In Tennessee, assistant principals spend more time on discipline and less time on observing teachers and instructional planning than principals do, but there is a lot of overlap in roles
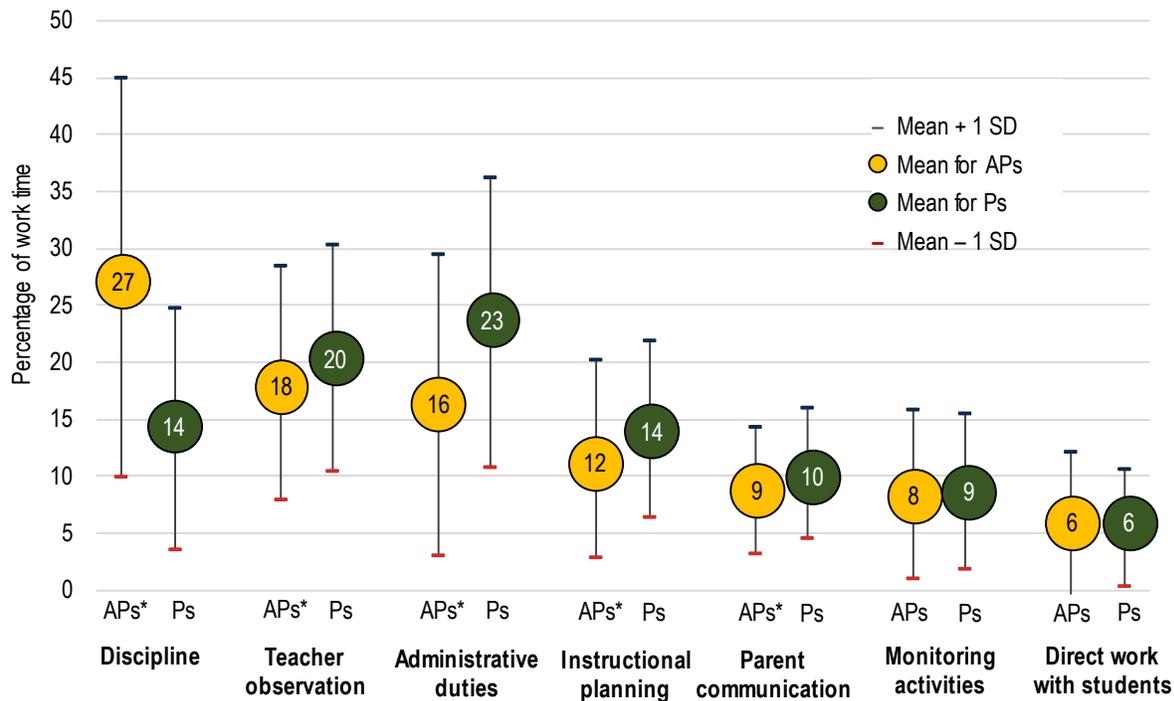
Source: Tennessee Educator Survey data from Tennessee Department of Education, 2017–2018.

Note: Some 775 assistant principals and 793 principals responded to this question. The survey asked educators "in an average week, what percentage of your work time do you devote to each of the following activities?" The percentage of work time does not sum to 100 because "other" activities are not shown.

* Indicates whether time spent was significantly different for principals compared to assistant principals.

APs = assistant principals; Ps = principals; SD = standard deviation.

Assistant principal roles may vary across school and district contexts and background characteristics

Assistant principals' roles are influenced by state policy, most notably because of new teacher evaluation policies. Five studies examined the assistant principal role in relation to specific policy or program changes, such as teacher compensation and evaluation, Title I school improvement grants, and leadership preparation programs. In each of these studies, the assistant principal role changed in response to the policy. Teacher evaluation policies that require observations have shifted assistant principals' roles to more direct involvement in instructional leadership and working directly with teachers (Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019; Neumerski et al., 2018; Portin et al., 2009). Mandatory teacher evaluation and observation systems place a large strain on principals, and principals shift some of the observation tasks to assistant principals. Assistant principals not only observe teachers, but they also meet with them to provide post-observation feedback and professional development to address areas of weakness. One implication of this change is that some of the tasks that were previously handled by assistant principals are shifting to clerical staff so that assistant principals have time to engage in

evaluation-oriented work. The new policy related to teacher evaluation likely explains why assistant principals and principals take on instructional leadership roles in Tennessee and why there are differences in assistant principals' responsibilities in Tennessee and Virginia. In one study, principals without assistant principals advocated for assistant principals to assist them with teacher evaluation and feedback (Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019).

There is suggestive evidence that race and gender might be related to assistant principals' leadership roles. Two studies suggested that assistant principals of color were often called upon to address diversity in their schools. In a study of 15 Black female assistant principals, the assistant principals were tasked with addressing discipline, especially when incidents included Black students. They also worked on diversity issues schoolwide, such as helping teachers understand differences in social class or helping diversify advanced math classes, while maintaining interactions with all students to avoid the stereotype of working with only Black students (Moore, 2013). In another study, one Latinx assistant principal described feeling isolated in his work addressing issues of diversity with the staff (Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012). The assistant principal was working to ensure that all parents had a voice in school affairs, such that Black parents did not disenfranchise Latinx parents, and became frustrated by the perceived lack of response by teachers and colleagues, many of whom were white.

> [If] somebody's having a problem with a Black student…they come and get a Black teacher or Black administrator. Or they have a parent who's Black that they know is going to be difficult, and here they're trying to get me to intervene…I often try to verbalize to people that just because we look the same doesn't mean we have a shared experience.
>
> *(Study participant response in Moore, 2013, p. 497)*

In Tennessee, there were differences across race and gender in assistant principals' tasks, even after accounting for differences in types of schools in which these assistant principals work, such as locale and poverty level (Appendix Table B.2). Black assistant principals and female assistant principals spent more time on instructional leadership activities than their white and male colleagues. Future research is needed to explain these patterns.

There is consistent evidence that assistant principals are generally highly satisfied in their roles. Studies consistently reported that assistant principals were satisfied with their position (Conley et al., 2007; Houchens et al., 2018). One study from a county in California (with 344 assistant principals) reported that 92 percent were satisfied with their role and 78 percent indicated that they planned to stay in school administration as a career (Oliver, 2003). However, seven studies on assistant principal job satisfaction noted that satisfaction varied with specific aspects of the role related to (1) clear job responsibilities, (2) reasonable workload, (3) positive working relationships with coworkers, (4) receiving feedback from supervisors, (5) possibility of career advancement, and (6) support from families and communities (Barnett et al., 2012; Conley et al., 2007; Fields, 2005; Fields & Egley, 2005; Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012; Houchens et al., 2018; Oliver, 2003). One study of assistant principals in high schools found that they were most satisfied if their job responsibilities did not pull them in multiple directions (Conley et al., 2007). Job

satisfaction was also related to positive working relationships with their coworkers and receiving feedback from supervisors.

In one study, assistant principals who intended to seek career advancement in educational leadership reported higher job satisfaction relative to those who intended to stay in the assistant principal position (Conley et al., 2007). The study did not find statistically significant relationships between gender or years in the current position and job satisfaction (Conley et al., 2007). In another study on high school assistant principals, assistant principals reported the most satisfaction with facilities and resources and the least satisfaction with community support (Houchens et al., 2018). Assistant principals in another study noted dissatisfaction with quantity of tasks, paperwork, and lack of time, with no differences across school level or by gender (Oliver, 2003). Focus groups and interviews from two other studies provided additional insights into challenging aspects of the role or stressors, such as excessive workloads, handling difficult student issues, and confrontations with disgruntled teachers and parents (Barnett et al., 2012; Fields, 2005).

Evidence suggests that assistant principals may prefer instructional leadership roles and prefer working in higher-achieving schools. To examine the types of positions and schools in which assistant principals prefer to work, two studies in Kentucky used simulation experiments in which they sent assistant principals simulated job descriptions and asked them to rate the jobs (Munoz & Barber, 2011; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). Munoz and Barber (2011) found that assistant principals preferred assistant principal jobs that emphasized instructional leadership rather than student discipline. Winter and Morgenthal (2002) found that assistant principals preferred to become the principal of higher-achieving schools, but Munoz and Barber (2011) did not. The studies found that assistant principals did not have preferences about the schools' level or locale (inner city, suburb, or rural). However, assistant principals could act differently in actual application and job acceptance decisions. In Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Loeb et al. (2010) found that assistant principals and principals preferred to work in schools that were safe, well resourced, and close to home; that had lower percentages of students in poverty or English learners; and that met academic standards.

There is very limited research on districts' evaluation of assistant principals

[It's] confusing both for an assistant principal…[and] for me as a principal. If I'm evaluating my assistant principal and [the standards are] saying she should be doing all the things I'm doing, I don't think that [she should be]. …She doesn't get to set a new vision…because I'm running the school and I have a vision. And as an assistant principal, your job is to get on board with some of those things.

(Study participant response in Turnbull et al., 2016, p. 54)

Evaluation approaches are unclear and may not align with assistant principal roles and responsibilities. Five of the six districts participating in a Principal Pipeline Initiative used the same professional standards for evaluating assistant principals and principals, but assistant principals did not need to meet the same proficiency level as principals (Turnbull et al., 2016). Assistant principal evaluation instruments were modified versions of those used for principal evaluations and closely mirrored them. In focus groups, principals who conducted these evaluations regularly described this misalignment as a challenge to evaluation of assistant principals. In the

sixth district, there were no formal standards and no formal evaluation instrument for assistant principals. An interviewee from this district noted, "An interesting thing in our system is that there's a very rigorous and well-defined set of standards and a process for evaluating both teachers and principals, but not so much for assistant principals" (Turnbull et al., 2016, p. 50).

In the Principal Pipeline Initiative districts, survey responses from assistant principals in their first three years on the job similarly indicate the misalignment between evaluation standards and their role and responsibilities (Turnbull et al., 2016). In 2013, only 51 percent of assistant principals across all six districts indicated that their evaluation captured the "breadth and complexity" of their leadership role to a considerable or great extent, and 59 percent indicated their evaluation adequately reflected their performance to a considerable or great extent.[13] The surveys of assistant principals also found that within and across districts, and sometimes in the same school when there were multiple assistant principals, instructions and procedures for evaluation were not consistent (Turnbull et al., 2016).

One study in Alabama reported that some assistant principals did not even know the criteria by which they were evaluated. Searby et al. (2017, p. 414) asked in a survey, "When you are formally evaluated on your performance as an administrator, what percent of your evaluation is based on your instructional leadership performance?" Approximately 31 percent of assistant principals indicated that they did not know if they were evaluated based on instructional leadership, and an additional 33 percent stated that they were not familiar with the evaluation system used to judge their performance.

A few studies highlighted some of the shortcomings of current assistant principal evaluation processes. One study examined evaluation ratings of assistant principals from the 2011–2012 school year under Florida's new administrator evaluation system. Among the assistant principals who were evaluated, 26 percent were deemed highly effective and more than 70 percent were rated effective (Folsom et al., 2015). In other words, in practice, evaluations told little about how one assistant principal differed from any other, and everyone seemed to be effective. In the six Principal Pipeline Initiative districts, some district-level administrators expressed concern over the evaluation process. They said that principals often were not assertive and direct in their communication with assistant principals. These communications issues allowed ineffective assistant principals to continue in the role rather than be filtered out (Turnbull et al., 2015). Forty percent of assistant principals in the six principal pipeline districts themselves noted that their performance evaluation was not useful for informing their professional practice (Turnbull et al., 2015, 2016).

Key takeaways

Key takeaways on the assistant principal role include the following:

- **Most assistant principals undertake a mix of instructional leadership, management, and student discipline leadership tasks, although the allocation of time to these tasks varies, often assigned at the discretion of the principal.** The assistant principal role is

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[13] Assistant principals were surveyed in 2012 and 2013, but there were no statistically significant differences between the two years.

much more complex and nuanced than one framed as either focused on instructional leadership or discipline. There is limited evidence that some assistant principals appear to take on similar duties as principals, although assistant principals seem to spend more time on student discipline.

- **Assistant principals' tasks vary across policy contexts and individual background characteristics.** State policy contexts, such as new teacher observation and evaluation mandates, may explain some of the variation in assistant principals' roles as more recent data suggest instructional leadership is more of a focus than reported in earlier research. There is suggestive evidence that assistant principals of color may be called upon more often to address diversity issues.

- **States and districts mostly use the same standards and evaluation rubrics for both principals and assistant principals.** Part of the ambiguity of the assistant principal role may stem from the lack of specific professional standards for assistant principals and clear criteria for evaluation.

- **Not all assistant principals have leadership roles and responsibilities that might best prepare them for the principalship.** Assistant principal job descriptions do not typically articulate that the position is a possible pathway to the principalship. There is no research on whether, when assigning leadership tasks to assistant principals, principals consider developmental experiences to prepare assistant principals for the principalship.

- **Assistant principals report that they are highly satisfied with their roles.** Furthermore, assistant principals may prefer instructional leadership roles, suggesting that a shift to greater instructional leadership responsibilities would not reduce their job satisfaction.

Questions for future research

- **How do principals make decisions about the assignment of leadership tasks to assistant principals? What are the implications for equity and diversity?** Research could examine how assistant principals' leadership tasks relate to their background characteristics (such as race, ethnicity, and gender); school context; and policies and explore explanations for these relationships, including bias.

- **To what extent and in what ways do assistant principals' roles and time allocation influence the workloads of other school leaders and leadership teams?** No research exists on how assistant principals' roles relate to the roles of principals, teacher leaders, or instructional coaches or influence approaches to distributed leadership.

- **What leadership titles and positions denote the assistant principal role? Do different names or titles signal differentiated roles?** There is no research on various types and titles of assistant principals, such as assistant or associate principals, sub-school principals, or dean of students. Some large high schools have a team of assistant principals and each could be assigned different roles, such as assistant principal for instruction or assistant principal for administration.

- **Are different types of career ladders for assistant principals effective for building leadership capacity?** There is no research on differentiated career ladders or certification tiers for assistant principals. For example, some districts have distinct types of assistant principals and have expectations for beginning and experienced assistant principals.

- **How do principals understand their roles as supervisors of assistant principals and how do principals evaluate assistant principals and provide them feedback?** There is limited research on policies and practices that guide assistant principal evaluation, and few measures are available to understand assistant principal performance and effectiveness.

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V. WHAT IS THE PATHWAY TO THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALSHIP AND FROM THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALSHIP TO THE PRINCIPALSHIP?

Many assistant principals move along a pathway from teaching to administrative preservice preparation programs and licensure to the assistant principalship. Assistant principals may then ascend to the principalship, although some aspiring leaders go directly into the principalship from teaching and licensure. However, most districts and states have not clearly articulated whether the assistant principal role is explicitly an apprenticeship for the principal position, a designated career leadership role separate from a stepping-stone to the principalship, or both.

This chapter presents findings from research studies and analyses of state data about the movement of aspiring leaders along the pathway from teaching to administrative preservice preparation programs to the assistant principal role and on to the principalship. It highlights the reality that after receiving training and licensure in *principal* preparation programs, aspiring leaders often start working as assistant principals instead of as principals. The chapter also describes the importance of professional development and on-the-job mentoring experiences for assistant principals. The studies and data described in this chapter are summarized in Box V.1.

We discuss how the pathway to the assistant principalship and principalship differs for educators of color and female assistant principals in Chapter VI. Because educators of color and women face different experiences as they travel along the pathway to the principalship, and these experiences have implications for diversity and equity, we describe them in a separate chapter.

> **Box V.1. Studies and data on the pathway to the assistant principalship and the principalship**
>
> *Forty-six coded studies*
>
> **Publication type**
> - 38 studies in peer-reviewed journals
> - 8 unpublished reports
>
> **Methodology**
> - 17 qualitative studies (9 case studies, 6 interview studies, 2 other)
> - 27 quantitative studies (16 descriptive, 11 correlational)
> - 2 mixed methods studies
>
> *Data*
>
> Tennessee Educator Survey data (2017–2018)
> Tennessee administrative data (2011–2018)
> Pennsylvania administrative data (2011–2018)

There are complex pathways from teaching to assistant principal and principal positions

States and district policies do not define a specific pathway from teaching to the assistant principalship to the principalship. However, most assistant principals follow a similar pathway: beginning in a teaching position, participating in a preservice principal certification program, then moving into an assistant principal role and receiving on-the-job professional development (Folsom et al., 2015; Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017). Many assistant principals move on to the principalship. Figure V.1 shows common career steps and mechanisms of

the journey along that pathway, as described in the literature. Equity influences how educators experience movement along the pathway.

Figure V.1. There are complex pathways from teaching to assistant principal and principal positions
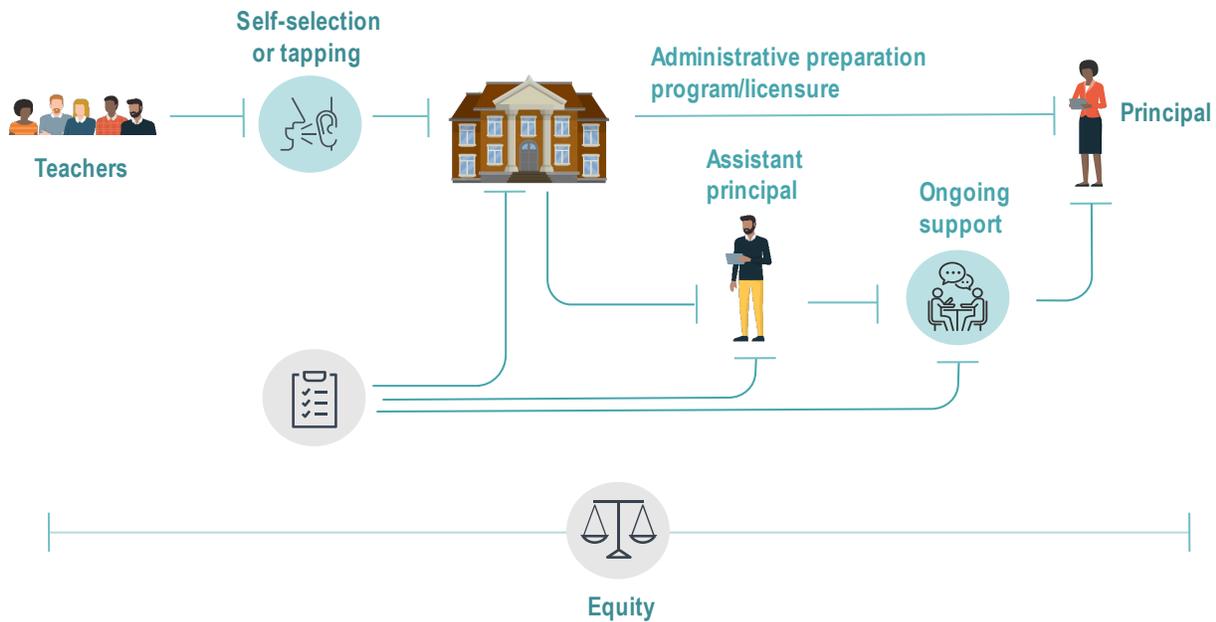
Source: Authors' depiction based on the literature.

Note: Standards and equity are covered in different chapters.

The pathway to the assistant principal role moves through leadership preservice preparation programs

Teachers either self-nominate or are encouraged by others to consider school leadership. Teachers typically begin their progress along the pathway to an assistant principalship by considering leadership as a career move. The idea of leaving the classroom for a leadership position generally involves self-initiation; recruitment; or encouragement from others, often called "tapping" (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Myung et al., 2011). Teachers who are tapped to consider leadership are urged by their principals to enroll in preservice leadership preparation programs (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Myung et al., 2011; Normore, 2007; Parylo et al., 2012). In one study that sought to identify major themes in the career paths of 16 current principals, the authors found "anticipation of becoming a principal seemed to be present only when the participants were established in a teaching career, and once someone mentioned, suggested, or encouraged them to become a school leader" (Parylo et al., 2012, p. 577). Another case study of a leadership development program in an urban district in a southeastern state reported that tapping teachers was a districtwide expectation. As one senior administrator in the district stated, "Principals are really expected to find teachers who exhibit leadership behaviors and to suggest the leadership track" (Normore, 2007, p. 23). A study of 15,840 teachers in Miami-Dade County found that teachers who reported being tapped were five times more likely to express interest in becoming a principal than teachers who were not tapped (Myung et al., 2011).

The role of tapping in moving from teaching to the assistant principalship is supported further in a study in Georgia where principals recounted their movement from teaching to their first assistant principal position. Buckman et al. (2018) reported that 30 percent of principals indicated that they were promoted from within their school to their first assistant principal position, 47 percent were promoted from within their district, and 24 percent were promoted from outside their district. This study found that assistant principal candidates who applied to a position at the school where they worked as a teacher received significantly more job offers than candidates from other schools in the district or other districts, accounting for differences in candidates' characteristics such as gender, race and ethnicity, years of experience as an educator, and the student achievement at their schools.

There is consistent evidence that most assistant principals aspire to become principals. The assistant principal position is often the first step into school leadership after state certification, and most assistant principals aspire to be principals (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Loeb et al., 2010; Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017). In a study in Miami-Dade County, 80 percent of assistant principals indicated that they wanted to become a principal, and 63 percent of first-time principals had been assistant principals in the district the year before becoming a principal (Loeb et al., 2010). In Virginia, 65 percent of assistant principals in elementary schools, 41 percent in middle schools, and 34 percent in high schools aspired to the principalship (although the study had a response rate of only 34 percent and we do not know if people who did not respond might have been more or less likely to say they wanted to be principals; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). One study in Delaware noted that several assistant principals preferred to stay in that role (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). These assistant principals noted they liked "the more limited responsibilities they had [compared to principals]. In this sense, the working conditions of the assistant principalship were attractive whereas those of the principalship were less so" (p. 805).

Certification requirements for assistant principals

Most states use the same certification for assistant principals and principals.[†] Although each state has its own requirements for principal certification, the requirements typically include classroom teaching experience, a minimum degree requirement, completing a state approved leadership preparation program, and a licensure exam.

Only five states have unique licensure for assistant principals or a tiered licensing approach for assistant principals that is different from principals: Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, and New Hampshire (Education Commission of the States, 2018). For those states with unique assistant principal licensure, the assistant principal certification typically includes a subset of requirements for principal certification, such as a minimum degree requirement, teaching experience or related professional certification, and leadership coursework or program completion. After the assistant principal licensure, additional requirements for principal certification might then include a licensure exam, performance-based certification, and/or additional coursework. For instance, in Maryland, assistant principal certification includes the following subset of requirements for principal certification: applicants must hold a master's degree, have 27 months of teaching experience or a professional teaching certificate, and have completed an approved leadership preparation program linked to certification; principal certification then has an additional requirement of passing the School Leaders Licensure Assessment exam (Md. Code Regs. 13A.12.04.04).

In some states, assistant principal certification can be used to satisfy various principal certification requirements, but it is not a requirement for principal certification. For example, in Maine, individuals can obtain an assistant principal certificate, and after one school year as a certified assistant principal they can apply for a principal certificate. Alternatively, an individual could apply directly for the principal certificate and complete a graduate-level, state-approved administrator internship or a commissioner-approved mentorship plan instead of the year-long assistant principal term (Code Me. R. tit. 05-071 Ch. 115, Pt. II, § 4). Similarly, in Florida, the assistant principal certificate, which includes a minimum degree requirement of a master's degree and completion of the Florida Educational Leadership core curriculum, can satisfy the professional certificate requirement for principal (Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 6A-4.0082, Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 6A-4.0083).

Tennessee and North Carolina offer short-term assistant principal certification. In Tennessee, individuals who are enrolled in a leadership preparation program can obtain three-year, nonrenewable assistant principal licensure. When this licensure expires, individuals must apply for the standard principal licensure to continue as an assistant principal or to move up to the principalship (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018). In North Carolina, short-term assistant principal certification is only offered in times of a principal shortage. If the local school board determines that there is a shortage of individuals with principal licensure, the school board can issue a provisional principal certification that allows an individual who is enrolled in a master's of education administration program to serve as an assistant principal for three years (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

[†] Certification and licensure are often used interchangeably and refer to requirements to obtain authorization to work as a leader in a public/charter schools.

No studies examine whether differentiated (tiered) licensure and certification increase accessibility to or length of service in the assistant principal role or if they are a barrier to the principalship. There is also no information about how assistant principal licensure requirements relate to assistant principal and principal effectiveness.

There is consistent evidence that preservice programs do not specifically focus on training assistant principals, although graduates are more likely to initially serve as assistant principals, not principals.

Principal preparation and leadership certification programs serve as the typical preservice preparation for assistant principals, yet most graduates from preservice programs initially serve as assistant principals rather than principals. However, the rates at which graduates were placed in assistant principal and principal positions varied across programs and states. Fusarelli et al. (2019) reported that 90 percent of graduates from North Carolina State University's principal preparation program were placed into assistant principal positions in the first year after graduation. The authors did not report principal placement rates. In Tennessee, across programs, 28 to 52 percent of program graduates who passed the licensure exam were hired as assistant principals, and 6 to 17 percent of program graduates with licenses became principals after five years (Grissom et al., 2019). Two studies in Texas reported that 50 percent of preservice program graduates were employed in assistant principal positions, whereas 21 percent were in principal positions after five years of completing the program (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2014; Fuller et al., 2016).

In contrast, in an evaluation of five principal preparation programs that are part of the Alliance to Reform Educational Leadership network, Clifford et al. (2016) reported that one program saw more graduates placed directly as principals than as assistant principals. Specifically, out of 148 program graduates, 41 percent were employed as assistant principals within one year of graduation, and 51 percent of graduates were employed as principals. Importantly, the authors did not provide contextual information about the program or where it is located, and thus we are not able to identify program characteristics that may explain why placement rates in this program differ from other, documented statewide trends.

Not all graduates of preservice programs are in principal or assistant principal roles. New analyses of Pennsylvania data show that among teachers who obtain an administrative license, approximately 10 percent are working as assistant principals after four years, 7 percent are working as a principal, 61 percent are still working as a teacher, and the remainder are working in other positions or no longer working in the state.[14]

Placement in assistant principal or principal roles may vary by locale. In Indiana, among program graduates who were placed in school leadership positions, 55 percent became assistant principals and 45 percent became principals. Among those who went on to work as administrators in urban areas, 75 percent became assistant principals and 25 percent became principals (Bathon & Black, 2011).

Candidates themselves may seek assistant principal roles rather than the principalship upon completing their preservice programs. One study of 217 program participants enrolled in seven Florida leadership preparation programs found that 84 percent of participants intended to seek an assistant principal position upon graduation (Eadens et al., 2012). This is not surprising given that Florida has an assistant principal license and the majority of school districts in Florida require experience as an assistant principal before applying for a principal position. Thus, this percentage

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[14] Teachers' salaries are increased after obtaining a master's degree under traditional teacher salary schedules in most states (Hanushek, 2007). This policy has been criticized as incentivizing teachers to obtain a master's in educational administration with no specific intention of moving into school leadership (Levine, 2005).

may be higher than in other states and districts without this requirement. This study did not ask if the participants also aspired to become principals.

Preservice programs usually include formal coursework and some also provide mentoring. Research reports that assistant principals are highly satisfied with these programs. In a study of 69 assistant principals in South Texas, many participants reported that the most powerful form of support they received—both preservice and once on the job—was their preservice mentoring (Barnett et al., 2017). Analyses of Tennessee data found that assistant principals reported positive experiences and were highly satisfied with their preservice programs. Ninety percent of assistant principals in Tennessee reported that their programs were rigorous, that programs taught them what they needed to know, and that they would attend the program again (authors' calculations).

Although formal principal preservice programs are the traditional training ground for assistant principals, district-affiliated leadership pipelines have emerged in recent years. Pipeline programs typically envision leadership training as a continuum—beginning with the development of teacher leaders, followed by the assistant principal role, and later onward to the principalship—all within the specific district context (Normore, 2007; Turnbull et al., 2013, 2015, 2016). For example, one large district in a southeastern state envisioned its preparation program for the assistant principal position as a way "to provide professional development experiences for emerging/aspiring school leaders (that is, teacher leaders) in developing competency-based instructional leadership skills, community leadership skills, and systems management skills" (Normore, 2007, pp. 14–15).

The experiences of assistant principals in pipeline programs are mixed. In focus groups with novice and experienced assistant principals who participated in district-sponsored programs in six urban districts, participants spoke highly of the programs. However, they also emphasized the importance of day-to-day, on-the-job interactions with their principals (Turnbull et al., 2016). The same study described the challenges of balancing support for assistant principals in their current roles and preparing them for the principalship because the work of assistant principals often differed from that of the principal, and many assistant principals were not likely to become principals. Other challenges included "tailor[ing] conventional group professional development to individual needs" and "balance[ing] tensions in the assistant principal's role" (Turnbull et al., 2016, p. viii) since it was a "stepping stone for some but a dead end for others" (Turnbull et al., 2016, p. 60).

In a case study of another induction program in a large urban district in a southeastern state, assistant principals were critical of a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development (Normore, 2007). One interim assistant principal stated that "everything is addressed 'en masse' and everyone is forced to do everything instead of doing only what is needed" (p. 21). This study also noted that the lack of coordination between local universities and school districts can create redundancies and misalignment in professional development and support offerings for assistant principals in pipeline programs. Assistant principals in the study voiced frustration about misalignment between professional development content and the responsibilities and skills required to effectively carry out their work.

There is limited research on how characteristics of preservice preparation programs relate to the likelihood of obtaining an assistant principal position versus a principal position or relate to the effectiveness of assistant principals. Studies found little relationship between characteristics of preservice preparation programs and obtaining an assistant principal versus principal position or assistant principal performance. In their longitudinal study of preparation programs and placement of graduates in Texas, Fuller et al. (2016) found very small relationships between program characteristics and placement as an assistant principal within five years of certification. Specifically, they found a small positive relationship between job placement and attending a Research I or II level university compared to master's level universities. They also found a positive relationship between obtaining an assistant principal position and attending smaller programs (defined as fewer graduates obtaining certification per year). In a subsequent study, Fuller et al. (2019) found no statistically significant relationship between attending particular types of universities (Research I or Research II) and placement as an assistant principal, supporting the overall conclusion that there are no clear patterns of what types of university programs are more effective than others. The lack of clear patterns is also consistent with findings from a study of Tennessee principal preparation programs that prepared both principals and assistant principals. Grissom et al. (2019) found no definitive patterns to indicate that principals from some programs were "consistently exemplary—or low-performing" across the outcomes considered (p. 106). Thus, the study results "point[ed] neither toward outstanding principal preparation programs that the state might study to learn what selection or curricular practices work especially well nor toward failing principal preparation programs with whom the state should obviously intervene" (p. 106).

Assistant principals value on-the-job learning experiences

Professional development programs for assistant principals align with the needs identified by assistant principals.
Studies found that assistant principals sought professional development in a wide array of topics, including managerial tasks, such as finance and budgeting; instructional leadership; and work habits, such as time management and stress coping mechanisms (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Fields, 2005; Master et al., 2020; Oliver, 2005; Ricciardi & Petrosko, 2001; Table V.1).[15] Assistant principals value their professional development opportunities; they believe the supports help them develop as assistant principals and understand the role of the principalship, and such supports contribute to their future performance as a principal (Barnett et al., 2017; Johnston et al., 2016; McClellan & Casey, 2015; Mertz, 2006; Searby et al., 2017). In a case study by Gurley et al. (2015) of 24 practicing assistant principals in a district-based professional development program, participants reported that participation strengthened their instructional leadership capabilities, increased their institutional perspective, and most of all strengthened their collaborative practice. Respondents "consistently indicated" that the

> In order to be a principal, you need to go through that experience, and you need to have a lot of skill sets that assistant principals refine, and it prepares you for the principalship.
>
> *(Study participant response in Parylo et al., 2012, p. 576)*

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[15] The Master et al. (2020) study was released after we finished our search, but it is described in the synthesis due to its importance.

focus on instructional leadership was "one of the most important aspects" leading to their professional growth (p. 229). Gurley et al. (2015) write that "virtually all respondents mentioned … how much collegial discussions and informal networking meant to them in providing support for the practical application of their new learning and in the performance of their daily duties" (p. 229). Two other studies of programs for assistant principals portrayed content as balanced between instructional and managerial leadership skill development (Enomoto, 2012; Oliver, 2005). In a survey of 56 assistant principals in a leadership intern program in Kentucky supporting first-year assistant principals, respondents' top three developmental needs included improving staff (61 percent), planning and implementing curricular change (55 percent), and supervising the instructional program (41 percent; Ricciardi & Petrosko, 2001). Oliver (2005) surveyed 390 assistant principals in three districts in Southern California and reported the three areas rated most important for their professional development were all related to instructional leadership: 82 percent of respondents said student learning, 90 percent said instruction, and 70 percent said curriculum.

Table V.1. Formal professional development programs for assistant principals aligned with the needs mentioned by assistant principals in the literature

Study author(s)	Year	Location	Format and characteristics of professional development	Topics/content
Oliver	2005	3 districts in Southern California	• District-provided formal professional development	Three most common foci: • 2000—(1) management, such as legal updates; (2) personnel procedures; and (3) assessment procedures • 2004—(1) management, (2) student learning, and (3) curriculum and instruction
Enomoto	2012	Rural Hawaii	• District-based, yearlong program • University support • Formal professional development sessions	• Program offerings: Content knowledge of relevant state policies and hiring/personnel practices; skill development; performance appraisals of students/faculty/staff; and leadership skills (for example, effective communication)
Gurley et al.	2015	Southeastern state	• District-based, two-year academy program • Specific emphasis on instructional leadership • University partnership • Formal professional development sessions	• Year 1: Primarily instructional leadership • Year 2: Mix of instructional and managerial leadership • Overall: Several sessions on conducting classroom observations and providing effective feedback to teachers; exposure to district programming and initiatives, curriculum, instructional issues, technology use

Research also notes areas of support that are not sufficiently addressed. In one district in a midwestern state, assistant principals in turnaround schools reported that, despite being expected to engage with community members, they had not received training on how to effectively engage with the community and thus relied on instincts and experience (Bukoski et al., 2015). Participants in the Pathway to Leadership in Urban Schools (PLUS) program, which focused on developing the instructional leadership of assistant principals, commonly expressed the need for support in topics such as compiling data for school performance plans and creating a master course schedule (Master et al., 2020).

Studies consistently report that assistant principals' formal and informal mentoring and networking are important for their development. Multiple studies found that assistant principals valued professional interactions, whether through professional networks, on-the-job mentoring, or learning by doing (Table V.2). Liang and Augustine-Shaw (2016) found that 10 of the 12 assistant principals in a formal mentoring program rated the program to be of high quality. In a case study of four assistant principals in four districts in Texas, McClellan and Casey (2015) found that some assistant principals continued to rely on mentors from their preparation programs. Still, most of them reported that their growth as leaders came from learning from role models and mentors (formal and informal), particularly their principals, once on the job. Searby et al. (2017) found that assistant principals in Alabama believed the most effective mentoring was not through formal programs but through informal meetings with their principal or other assistant principals. Furthermore, these authors noted that assistant principals with five years or more of experience reported that they were well prepared as instructional leaders and did not need mentoring, whereas less experienced assistant principals (those with one to four years of experience) reported they needed mentoring, especially in the area of improving instruction. Through interviews over a three-year period with eight assistant principals, Mertz (2006) found that assistant principals learned by example of their principal or other assistant principals. Assistant principals reported that support from other administrators, especially their own principals, made them feel as if they had a "safety net" and emboldened them to take on new experiences and to "take chances" (Barnett et al., 2017, p. 295). A limitation of these studies is that it is not possible to clearly understand differences between formal and informal mentoring, and the studies lacked clear conceptions of mentoring.

> What aided me most was being able to work with a team that worked together and being able to go to experienced administrators and say, "What do you do with this? What do you do with that?" … And also, this is a little bit scary.… And sometimes [the administrators] give [a new task] to you even though you don't want it—like [the state testing program]…. But sometimes, just getting it, even though you don't want it, is best and can help you become a better assistant principal.
>
> *(Study participant response in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 295)*

A sample of 69 assistant principals in South Texas noted that the most helpful advice from mentors was in three key areas:

1. Skill development—needing to build strong relationships with people, hone their decision-making strategies, and develop strong people and communication skills.

2. Personal and professional development—the importance of continual growth by seeking formal and informal professional growth opportunities. Mentors also advised assistant principals about important personal qualities, such as persistence, hard work, and patience.

3. Values clarification—the need for clear vision and achievable goals while being realistic about what could be accomplished while maintaining work-life balance (Barnett et al., 2017).

Table V.2. Mentoring, networking, and on-the-job experiences are important to assistant principals for their professional growth

Study author(s)	Year	Location	Learning mode	Benefits
Mertz	2006	Southeast region	• Experiential learning • Informal mentors • Observation	• Learned by example of their principal or other assistant principals. • Reported their principals' approaches and actions served as models for how to be successful administrators. • Reported that their success as an assistant principal required the perception that they possess qualities valued by their principal.
McClellan and Casey	2015	Texas	• Experiential learning • Formal and informal mentors • Role models	• Participants grew as leaders by seeking out experiences beyond their standard assignments. This often meant pursuing new challenges *without* support and learning through trial and error. • Most learned from role models and mentors (formal and informal), particularly their principals. • Some relied on mentors from preparation programs.
Liang and Augustine-Shaw	2016	Kansas	• Formal mentoring program	Assistant principals rated the program as high quality. • Mean rating for all items was above four on a five-point scale. • Highest scoring items: mentor's feedback on performance observation (4.8), professional meeting (4.8), and utilization of coaching behaviors modeled by mentor (4.7). Assistant principal–identified program strengths included personalized assistance and growth-based content and activities.
Barnett et al.	2017	Southwest region	• Formal and informal mentors • Experiential learning • Networking with non-site-based administrators	Site-based administrators were crucial to assistant principal growth and development. • Assistant principals who felt supported by their principal and a network of professionals were emboldened to take on new experiences and "take chances." • Establishing a network of administrators beyond their own school whom they could trust so they could seek and share advice facilitated growth.
Searby et al.	2017	Alabama	• Formal and informal mentoring	Assistant principals reported most effective mentoring was not through formal programs but informal meetings with their principal or other assistant principals.

Access to professional development and mentoring for assistant principals varies. Despite the number of studies that consistently reported that assistant principals valued

professional development and mentoring, access to formal and informal mentoring and professional development varied (Johnston et al., 2016; Reyes, 2003). In a 2015 nationally representative survey of U.S. public school principals, only 36 percent of respondents reported that their districts provided professional development (other than mentoring or coaching) for assistant principals at least monthly (Johnston et al., 2016). Large districts (with more than 25,000 students) were more likely to require mentoring for first-year assistant principals as compared to midsized and smaller districts. Large districts were also more likely to have mentoring available for new assistant principals and struggling assistant principals even if they did not require mentoring for these assistant principals (Johnston et al., 2016; Figure V.2).

Access to mentoring and professional development for assistant principals might differ by school level as well. Oliver (2005) surveyed assistant principals in three districts in Southern California and reported that 40 percent of elementary, 45 percent of middle, and 55 percent of high schools had professional development for assistant principals. Oliver (2005) similarly found that many assistant principals lacked "specific" development plans.

Figure V.2. Availability and requirements for assistant principal mentoring varies
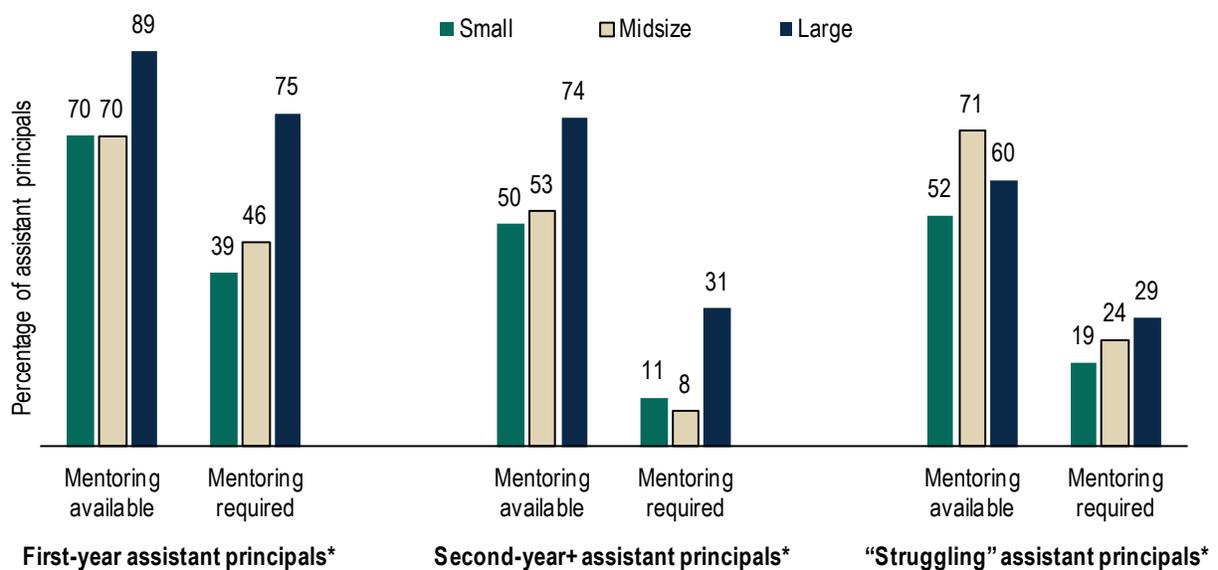
Note: An asterisk (*) indicates that the difference in the distribution of reports from principals in districts of different sizes was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). There was a 32 percent response rate. "Struggling" is not specifically defined.

Source: Johnston et al. (2016).

Finally, in a study of participants in a preservice principal preparation program, Reyes (2003) found that of 11 participants placed in assistant principal positions upon program completion, only 3 reported that they had formal mentors. All the assistant principals, except a charter school assistant principal, had informal mentors. The existing studies do not address reasons behind the lack of access to these support and development opportunities for all assistant principals.

Key takeaways

Key takeaways on the pathway to the assistant principalship and principalship include the following:

- **The typical pathway to the assistant principal role is complex and often begins with a teaching position.** Teachers are formally or informally tapped or encouraged to consider moving into administration or self-nominate for administration. There are very few studies about the characteristics and qualities of teachers who would be most successful at the assistant principal role or most likely to move along the pathway to the assistant principalship. However, districts with pipeline programs may likely reframe the pathway and move away from the traditional notion of tapping because they tend to implement systematic approaches to develop pools of candidates for leadership.

- **Even though many of the graduates of leadership preservice preparation programs first serve as assistant principals, the focus of preservice training is on the principalship.** There are no studies of the impacts of preservice preparation programs or their specific components (such as mentoring or coursework) on assistant principal effectiveness in specific roles, such as instructional leadership. However, studies have shown that differences among preservice programs, including their content, pedagogical approaches, and recruitment of program participants, are related to *principal* performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, 2021).

- **Assistant principals who have access to professional development, formal and informal mentoring, and networking with other school leaders highly value these opportunities.** However, these supports are not available to many assistant principals. Assistant principals in urban locales and larger districts are most likely to have access to mentoring.

- **There is confusion as to whether mentoring and professional development are aimed at helping assistant principals improve their effectiveness as assistant principals, move along the pathway to the principalship, or both.** Although most assistant principals aspire to the principalship, the research base is unclear as to whether the goal of ongoing support for assistant principals should be the same or differentiated for current assistant principals who aspire or do not aspire to the principalship or for those who are tapped or not tapped by their districts to move toward the principalship. In districts with principal pipeline programs, preparation may be more focused on assistant principals to prepare them to move to the principalship. The research provides limited insights about the extent to which formal and informal learning opportunities for assistant principals sufficiently focus on instructional leadership.

Questions for future research

- **What is the impact of preservice preparation programs and their specific components (such as mentoring or coursework) on assistant principal effectiveness, overall and in specific roles such as instructional leadership?** The research base about the pathway to the principalship for assistant principals is largely idiosyncratic, consisting of small-scale,

individual studies. Furthermore, studies of specific programs often omit the rich detail about program participants, context, and content, which would allow for cross-study comparisons or replication to inform the field about effective program characteristics. Larger scale, systematic data collection is crucial to better understand what pathway components and professional development are most effective for developing assistant principals. Research must include a broader range of outcomes, such as academic outcomes, social-emotional learning, student behavior, and educator retention.

- **To what extent and in what ways do mentoring and professional development opportunities influence assistant principal effectiveness or advancement to the principalship?** Research could examine what formal and informal mentoring entail and how mentoring and professional development opportunities align with the ways in which assistant principals can work with students and teachers to address equity and social-emotional learning. Beyond self-reported satisfaction from participants, evidence is sparse about the quality and efficacy of professional development and mentoring for improving assistant principal performance and employment opportunities as a principal.

- **How can principals be prepared to coach and mentor assistant principals?** Current evidence provides little indication that principals are required or prepared to work with assistant principals to coach them for the principalship.

- **How and to what extent is the type of state certification (specialized for assistant principals, tiered or not tiered) related to assistant principal or principal effectiveness, retention, and turnover?** Although a few states have differentiated or tiered certification, there are no studies about whether differentiated licenses increase accessibility to and length of service in the assistant principal role or if they pose equity barriers to the principalship.

- **Can the assistant principal position and coursework of principal preparation be done concurrently and integrated together?** Why is a leadership license required prior to the assistant principalship, and are there alternative models to preparation and pipeline approaches? Research can address whether aspiring principals should participate in licensure preparation programs after serving in the assistant principal role, rather than before. Residency programs, where assistant principals are in the role at the same time that they participate in formal coursework and licensing requirements, may be beneficial options.

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VI. HOW DOES ACCESS TO THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALSHIP AND THE PRINCIPALSHIP DIFFER BY EDUCATORS' RACE, ETHNICITY, AND GENDER?

A more diverse workforce of school leaders could lead to more equitable outcomes for students and educators. As a stepping-stone to the principalship, the assistant principal position plays a role in how educators of color and women may advance to the principalship. There are higher percentages of people of color in assistant principal positions than in principal positions (Folsom et al., 2015; Hollingworth & Dude, 2009; Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017). This may be because in some

states, educators of color are more likely to advance to the assistant principal position and less likely to directly advance to the principalship than white educators (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Fuller et al., 2019). In contrast, lower percentages of assistant principals and principals re women, compared to their representation as teachers (Folsom et al., 2015; Hollingworth & Dude, 2009; Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017). The reasons for these differences in advancement by race, ethnicity, and gender are complex and could include differences in access to mentoring, discrimination, time demands of school leadership, and differences in educators' aspirations or self-confidence.

In this chapter, we describe differences by race, ethnicity, and gender in the pathway to the principalship, especially as these differences relate to the assistant principal position. First, to provide context about where differences in

> **Box VI.1. Studies and data on access by race, ethnicity, and gender**
>
> *Seventeen coded studies*
> **Publication type**
> - 13 studies in peer-reviewed journals
> - 4 unpublished reports
>
> **Methodology**
> - 1 qualitative study (1 case study)
> - 16 quantitative studies (8 descriptive, 5 correlational, 3 simulated experiments)
>
> *Data*
> **National data**
> - Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey (1987–1988 through 2015–2016)
>
> **State data**
> - Tennessee administrative data (2011–2018)
> - Pennsylvania administrative data (2011–2018)

access to the principalship may emerge, we describe patterns of representation by race, ethnicity, and gender among teachers, assistant principals, and principals. These descriptions are based on existing studies and analyses of data in Tennessee and Pennsylvania. Second, we explore potential explanations for these patterns based on studies specifically focusing on tapping and mentoring. These findings may shed light on the potential barriers that people of color and women face in advancement to the principal position. The studies and data described in this chapter are summarized in Box VI.1.

Educators of color are more likely to be assistant principals than white educators and less likely to be principals

There is consistent evidence that assistant principals are more racially and ethnically diverse than teachers or principals but less diverse than students. There are no national data on the demographic characteristics of assistant principals, but there is information from studies of administrative data from Illinois, Iowa, Florida, and North Carolina (Folsom et al., 2015; Gates et al., 2004; Hollingworth & Dude, 2009; Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017; Ringel et al., 2004), plus new analyses of administrative data from Pennsylvania and Tennessee. These studies and analyses show that the percentages of educators and students who were people of color varied across states and years, but patterns of racial and ethnic differences between assistant principals and other groups of educators and students were generally similar across states (Figure VI.1).

Figure VI.1. Assistant principals are more likely to be people of color than are teachers or principals
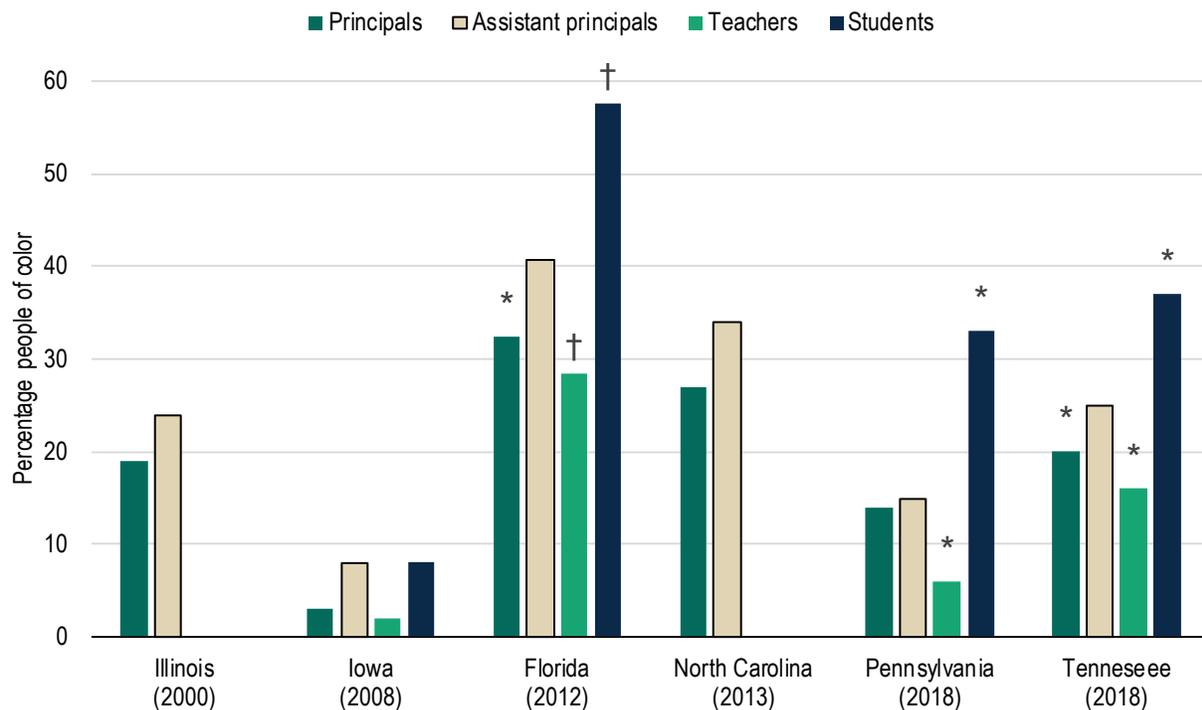
Source: Data from Illinois from Ringel et al. (2004); data from Iowa from Hollingworth and Dude (2009); data from North Carolina from Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017); data from Florida from Folsom et al. (2015); and administrative data from Pennsylvania and Tennessee, 2018.

Note: People of color include people who are Black, Latinx, Asian, or races and ethnicities other than white. Ringel et al. (2004), Hollingworth and Dude (2009), and Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017) did not test for statistically significant differences between groups. Figure does not include North Carolina data from Gates et al. (2004) because Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017) provide more recent data for North Carolina. Ringel et al. (2004) and Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017) did not provide data on teachers or students.

* Difference, relative to assistant principals, is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

† Difference, relative to assistant principals and principals combined, is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

In each state examined, people of color were underrepresented among teachers, assistant principals, and principals compared with the student population. The availability of data on each group varied, but across these states, on average, 34 percent of students were people of color, compared with 13 percent of teachers, 24 percent of assistant principals, and 19 percent of principals (not shown).

Notably, in these states, higher percentages of assistant principals than teachers or principals were people of color. However, the gaps between assistant principals and principals were smaller than those between assistant principals and teachers. In three studies of states and the analyses of data from Pennsylvania and Tennessee, most assistant principals of color were Black, but Florida also had a substantial percentage of Latinx assistant principals (Figure VI.2).

Figure VI.2. Among assistant principals of color, most are Black
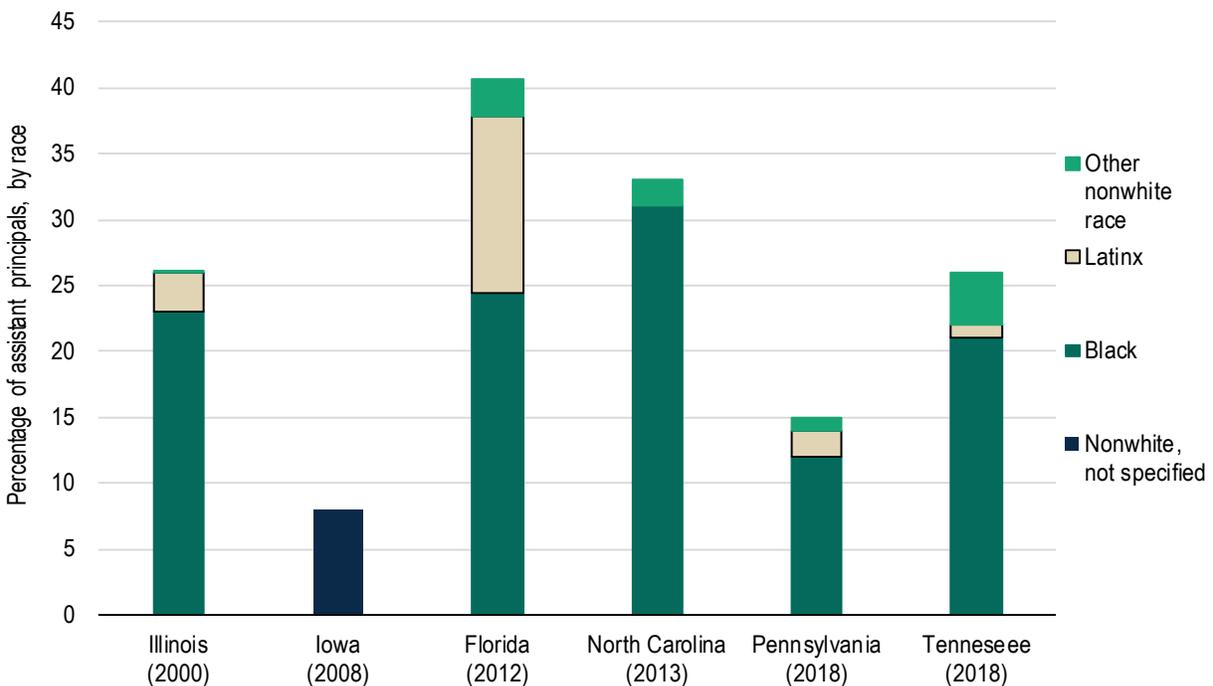
Source: Data from Illinois from Ringel et al. (2004); data from Iowa from Hollingworth and Dude (2009); data from North Carolina from Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017); data from Florida from Folsom et al. (2015); and administrative data from Pennsylvania and Tennessee, 2018.

Note: Figure does not include North Carolina data from Gates et al. (2004) because Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017) provide more recent data for North Carolina.

The patterns of findings on the racial and ethnic diversity of students, teachers, and principals nationally are fairly consistent with those from these six states, bolstering confidence in these findings for assistant principals. Nationally, 51 percent of students, 21 percent of teachers and 22 percent of principals are people of color (U.S. Department of Education 2019a, 2020a, b).

These differences in the racial and ethnic diversity of assistant principals and principals can, in part, reflect the fact that urban schools are more likely to have assistant principals, and there are greater numbers of people of color in urban areas. In the United States, people of color make up 42 percent of the urban population, compared with 20 percent of the rural population (U.S. Department of

Agriculture, 2018). Consistent with such differences in representation, one study in North Carolina and our analyses in Tennessee and Pennsylvania indicated that cities and suburbs had higher percentages of assistant principals who were people of color than did rural areas (Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017). Nevertheless, these differences can also reflect differences in opportunities, such as urban schools being more likely to hire assistant principals who are people of color (Reyes, 2003). We return to these topics later in this chapter.

There is mostly consistent evidence that the percentage of assistant principals who are people of color has generally increased over time.
Four studies of administrative data from Illinois, Iowa, and North Carolina (Gates et al., 2004; Hollingworth & Dude, 2009; Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017; Ringel et al., 2004) and an analysis of administrative data in Tennessee found that the percentages of assistant principals who were people of color increased over the time periods examined by each study or analysis (Figure VI.3). In contrast, analyses of administrative data in Pennsylvania found that the percentages of assistant principals who were people of color remained relatively constant between 2011 and 2018.

Figure VI.3. The percentage of assistant principals who are people of color has increased over time
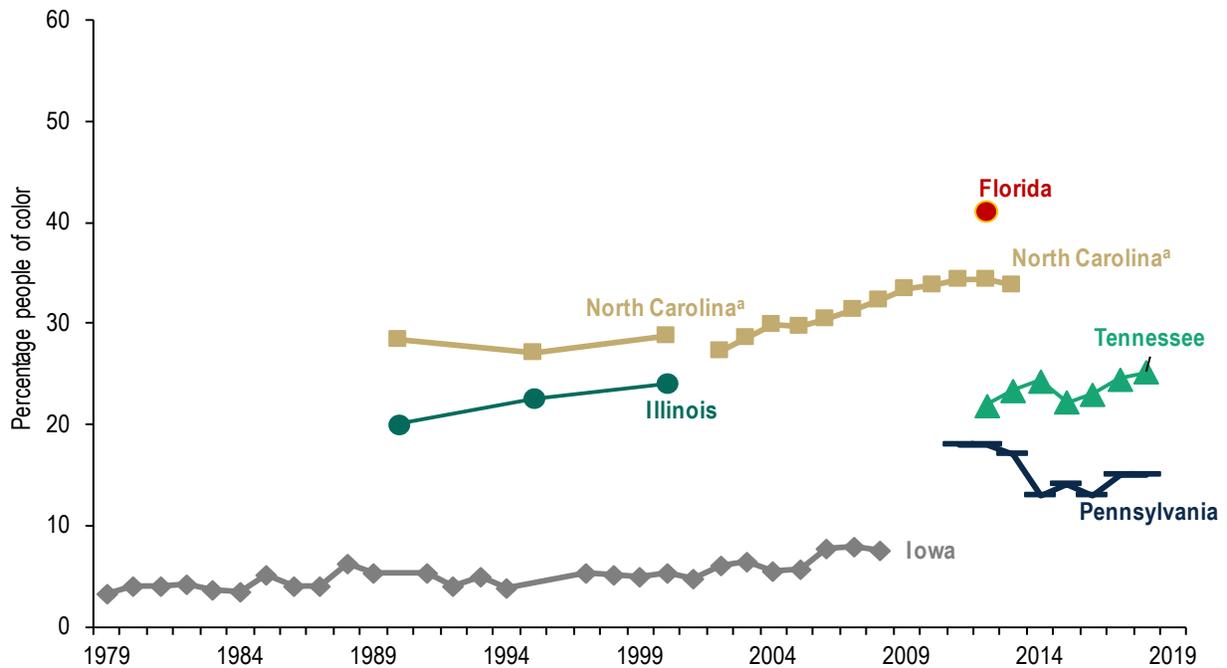
Sources: Data from Iowa from Hollingworth and Dude (2009), data from Illinois from Ringel et al. (2004), data from North Carolina from Gates et al. (2004) and Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom (2017); data from Florida from Folsom et al. (2015), and administrative data from Pennsylvania, 2011–2018 and administrative data from Tennessee, 2012–2018

[a]Data from North Carolina from 1990 to 2000 are from Gates et al. (2004) and from 2002 to 2013 are from Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017).

The proportion of assistant principals who are people of color will likely continue to increase, given the higher percentage of people of color among recent cohorts of new assistant principals. For example, one study in Texas found that the percentage of beginning assistant principals who were Latinx was more than 40 percent between 1998 and 2010 (Crawford & Fuller 2017). This was much higher than the percentage of all assistant principals who were Latinx and even exceeded the percentage of students in Texas who were Latinx in several of these years. In analyses of administrative data from Tennessee and Pennsylvania, higher percentages of beginning assistant principals compared to all assistant principals were people of color. The percentages of beginning assistant principals who were people of color increased in Tennessee from 2011 to 2018 (from 22 to 29 percent) and in Pennsylvania from 2013 to 2018 (from 10 to 20 percent), although there was an earlier drop between 2012 and 2013 before the increase.

In Texas, after graduating from principal preparation programs, educators of color are more likely to advance to the assistant principal position and less likely to directly advance to the principalship than are white educators; findings from other states are mixed. Three large-scale studies of administrative data in Texas found that Latinx and Black educators were more likely than white educators to become assistant principals or spent more time as an assistant principal before becoming a principal (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Fuller et al., 2019). Crawford and Fuller (2017) found that, five years after graduating from a principal certification programs, Latinx graduates in Texas became assistant principals more often, and advanced more slowly into the principalship, than did white graduates.

Also in Texas, Fuller et al. (2019) found that among men, higher percentages of Black and Latino graduates were employed as assistant principals than white graduates five years after certification, whereas higher percentages of white male graduates were employed as principals (Figure VI.4). Findings by race and ethnicity differed slightly for women, who, regardless of race or ethnicity, were less likely to be employed as assistant principals or principals than men. Five years after certification, Black female graduates were less likely than white female graduates to be employed as principals or assistant principals; Latina graduates were more likely to be employed as assistant principals than white female graduates and less likely to be employed as principals. Differences in the characteristics of preparation programs and educators' age generally did not explain these differences by race, ethnicity, and gender, with one exception: taking these differences into account, Latinas were more likely to be employed as principals than were white women.[16]

A final study in Texas found that Black assistant principals were 18 percent less likely than white assistant principals to be promoted to the principal position, accounting for differences in education, experience, school level, and school location (Bailes & Guthery, 2020).[17] Black assistant principals also waited longer for promotion than white assistant principals (5.3 years, on average, compared with 4.7 years for white assistant principals).

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[16] This description is based on the pattern of differences between women of different racial and ethnic groups and white men. Fuller et al. (2019) did not test whether differences between white women and women of color were statistically significant.

[17] This study was released after we finished our search, but it is described in the synthesis because of its importance.

The three studies included some adjustments related to locales, suggesting that differences in locale may not entirely explain these racial and ethnic differences in advancement. Bailes and Guthery (2020) controlled for school location, and the other two studies controlled for the number or change in school leadership positions in the region of graduates' principal preparation programs, which could partially account for differences in locales.

Figure VI.4. In Texas, there are racial and gender differences in whether preservice program graduates are employed as assistant principals or principals five years after certification
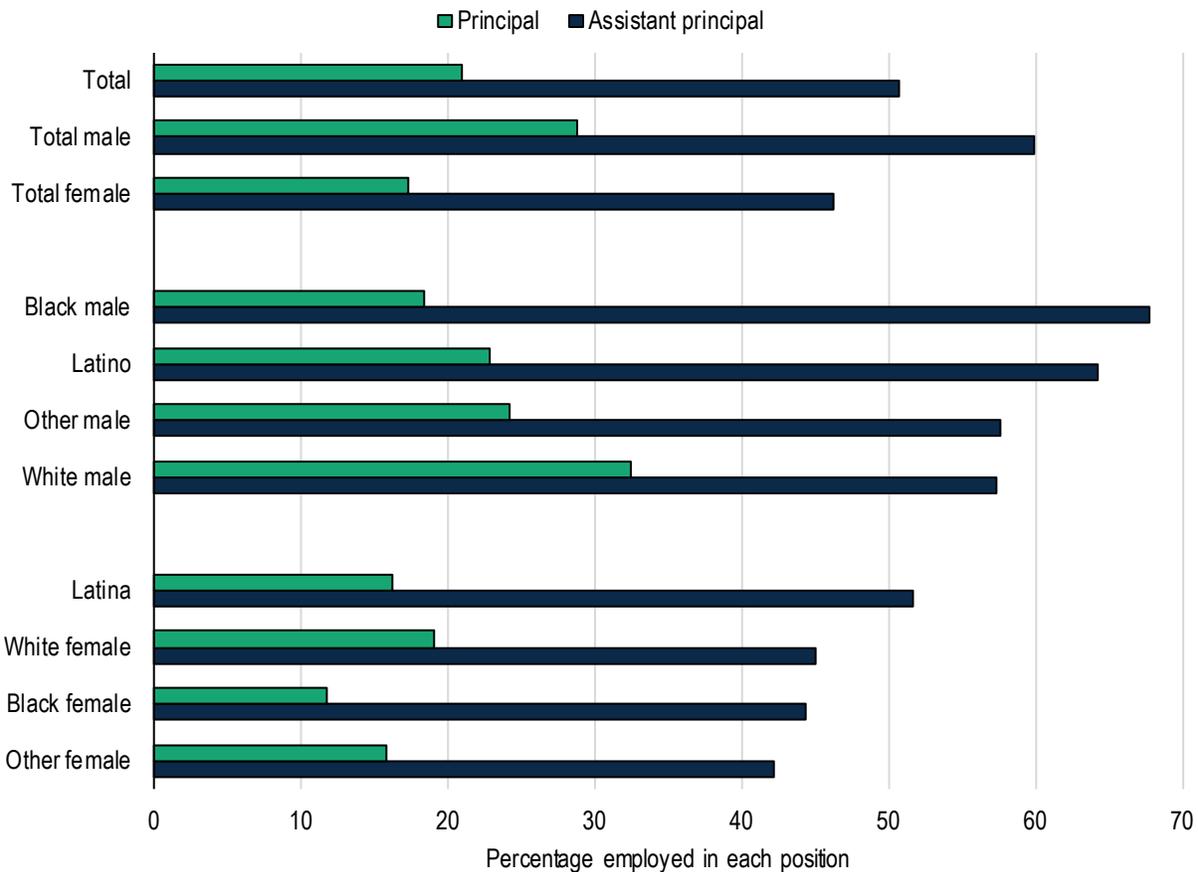
Source: Fuller et al. (2019).

Note: Percentages represent School Leadership Preparation Program graduates from 1993 to 2007, a total of 31,719 individuals.

In contrast, studies of administrative data in Illinois and North Carolina and analyses of administrative data in Tennessee and Pennsylvania either found no racial differences in advancement to the assistant principalship or principalship or found that Black educators were more likely to advance to the principalship than white educators, suggesting potential differences across contexts (Gates et al., 2004; Ringel et al., 2004; authors' calculations for Tennessee and Pennsylvania). In Tennessee, there were no significant differences between Black and white teachers in the likelihood of advancing to the assistant principal or principal position six years after receiving an administrative license (Figure VI.5). In Illinois and North Carolina, Black teachers were generally more likely than white teachers to advance to the assistant principalship but just as likely to directly advance to the

principalship (Gates et al., 2004; Ringel et al., 2004). In Pennsylvania, Black teachers were just as likely to advance to the assistant principal position within four years of receiving their administrative license, and more likely than white teachers to advance to the principal position (Figure VI.5).

In Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina, there were no racial differences in promotion from the assistant principalship to the principalship (Gates et al., 2004; see Appendix B, Figures B.6 and B.7). In Illinois, Black assistant principals were more likely than white assistant principals to become principals (Ringel et al., 2004).

Figure VI.5. In Pennsylvania and Tennessee, there is no evidence that Black teachers are less likely to be employed as assistant principals or principals after certification
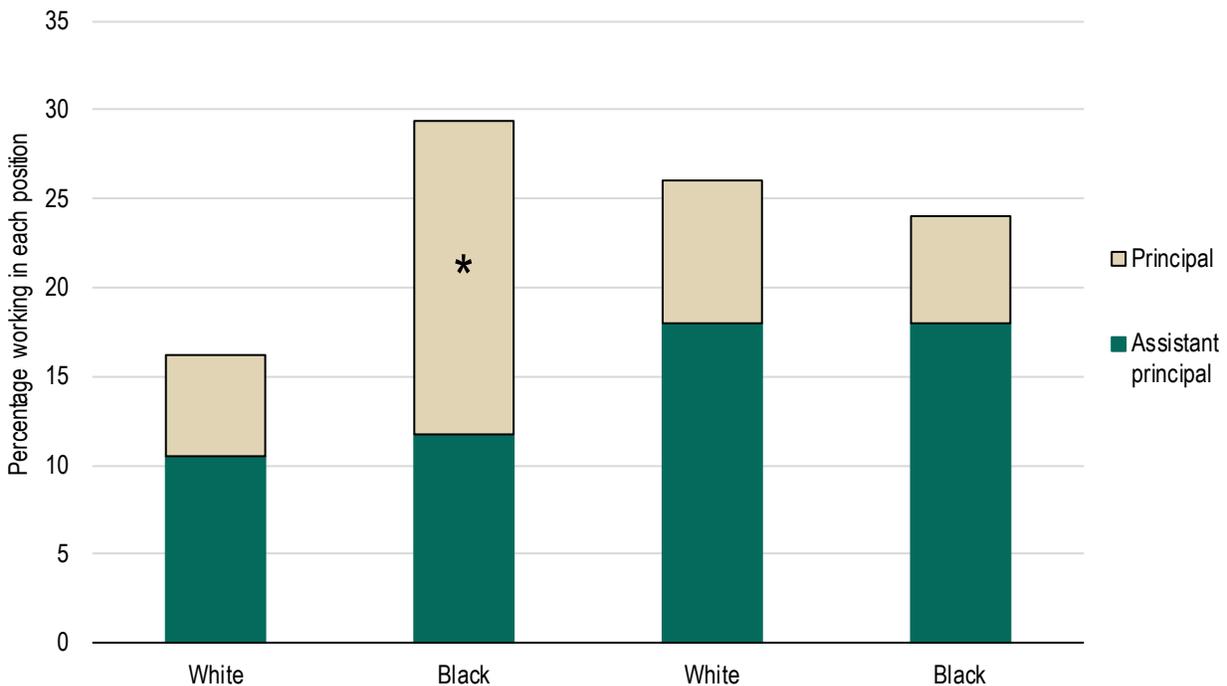
Sources: Pennsylvania administrative data, 2011–2018, and Tennessee administrative data, 2012–2018

Note: Based on the availability of certification and follow up data and sample sizes, for Pennsylvania, we examined four cohorts of teachers four years after receiving their administrative licenses and, for Tennessee, we examined teachers six years after receiving their administrative licenses (642 teachers in Pennsylvania and 519 teachers in Tennessee).

*Difference from white teachers is statistically significant at 0.05 level

Nationally, principals of color are more likely to have experience as an assistant principal than are white principals, even accounting for differences in school locales, other school characteristics, and whether they are novice principals.

According to the NTPS, in 2015–2016, 88 percent of Black principals and 90 percent of Latinx principals had experience as an assistant principal, compared with 74 percent of white principals and 80 percent of principals of other races and ethnicities (Figure VI.6). Racial and ethnic gaps in assistant principal experience were similar for novice principals.

Accounting for differences in the characteristics of the schools where principals work (such as schools' locale or enrollments) shrinks but does not entirely eliminate these racial and ethnic gaps.[18] Among all principals, Black and Latinx principals were still significantly more likely to have previous experience as an assistant principal than were white principals who led similar schools in the same locales. Black novice principals were significantly more likely to have previous experience as an assistant principal than were white principals who led similar schools in the same locales. These findings provide strong national evidence that white educators are more likely than educators of color to advance directly to the principal position, without a stint as an assistant principal. Moreover, these differences in assistant principal experience are not entirely explained by urban and rural differences in where educators work.

Figure VI.6. Principals of color are more likely to have assistant principal experience than are white principals
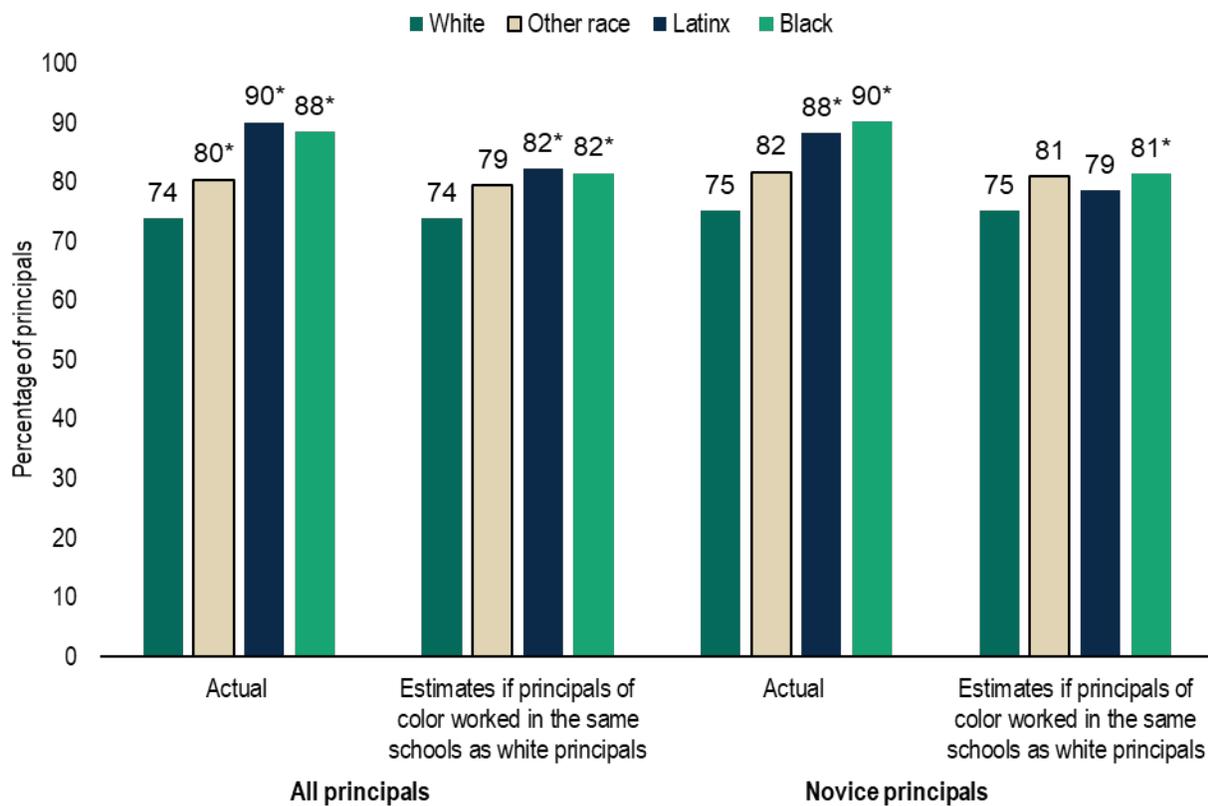
Source: National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools is 5,710 in 2015–2016. Estimates reflect the percentage of principals who held the position of assistant principal or program director before becoming a principal. Estimates are nationally representative. Novice principals are those in their first three years. Regression-adjusted estimates are presented for Black, Latinx, and other race principals in models that include controls for locale, region, school level, student enrollment, and percentage of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch.

* Difference, relative to white, is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

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[18] These racial and ethnic gaps in assistant principal experience have remained relatively constant over time (see Appendix B, Figure B.10).

Racial and ethnic differences in advancement along the principal pathway might be explained by differences in access to mentorship or by discrimination

There is some indication that Black educators, particularly those who are women, may receive less mentoring. In a study of the role of mentoring on job placement for 25 preservice principals in Houston, four of the five participants who reported not having either an informal or formal mentor were Black women (there were seven Black women in the study; Reyes, 2003). These four women were teaching in suburban districts and applied for administrative positions in their districts but were not hired. They were encouraged to apply for positions in urban districts and most said they would consider it, but three were still working as teachers and one was working as a private daycare provider at a one-year follow up. In contrast, the other three Black women in the study who reported having formal mentors were all hired as assistant principals.

In the 2018 Tennessee Educator Survey, Black assistant principals were significantly more likely to report having no informal meetings—one possible type of mentorship—with their principals in a typical day than were white assistant principals (24 percent versus 14 percent).

These findings raise questions about whether educators of color might also be less likely than white educators to be tapped for school leadership, though no studies provided evidence of racial differences in tapping. One study in Miami-Dade found that educators of color were more likely than white educators to be tapped for school leadership positions (Myung et al., 2011). Yet the educator workforce in Miami-Dade Public Schools is much more racially and ethnically diverse than most districts in the United States—the majority of principals in this district are people of color—so it is not clear whether findings would be similar in other districts. In analyses in Tennessee, similar percentages of Black assistant principals and white assistant principals reported that their current principal encouraged them to become a principal in the future, adjusting for other differences across assistant principals, principals, and the schools in which they worked.

Studies suggest some bias in hiring based on race. One simulated experiment found evidence of bias against hypothetical Latinx assistant principal candidates, whereas another experiment did not (Young & Fox, 2002; Young & Sever, 2011). In these studies, researchers sent principals around the country resumes for hypothetical assistant principal job candidates who had the same qualifications but different names. Young and Fox (2002) found that principals were more likely to say they would extend an interview for an assistant principal position to hypothetical candidates with Asian-sounding names (that is, the surname "Aoisola") than to similar candidates with Latinx- or Native American-sounding names (that is, the surnames "Cieloazul" or "Bluesky"). (The study did not send out resumes with white- or Black-sounding names.) In contrast, Young and Sever (2011) found no differences in principals' reported assessment of the likelihood of extending a job offer or initial salary offers to candidates for a middle school assistant principal position that had Latinx-sounding names (that is, the surname "Brillo") compared with candidates with non-Latinx sounding names (the surname "Bright").

Because, by design, the hypothetical candidates only differ on personal characteristics, these studies provide compelling evidence about principals' perceptions about candidates with different

characteristics. However, in the studies, substantial percentages of the principals who were sent resumes (39 to 60 percent) did not respond to the researchers, suggesting that findings from the experiments may not be representative for all principals. In addition, principals could act differently in actual hiring decisions. Results from an in-depth study of a Latino assistant principal indicated that he thought he would not be considered for principal positions in schools with majority white populations or lower levels of poverty; this finding was also reported in another study of a Black female administrator who participated in a larger study of career aspirations among women administrators in Florida (Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012; McGee, 2010).

> I was not hired and informed that I was "not the right fit," but I was never sure what that meant. African American female administrators are even more of a minority in our district. Most of the ones that are hired are placed in high-poverty schools. Perhaps this is where we fit?
>
> *(Study participant response in McGee, 2010, p. 15)*

Therefore, hiring bias may contribute to why assistant principals of color are more likely to work in higher-poverty schools or more urban locales.

Female educators are less likely than male educators to advance to assistant principal or principal positions

There is consistent evidence that women are underrepresented among both assistant principals and principals, compared with their representation among teachers. Studies of state administrative data from Illinois, Iowa, Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee showed that in these states, women made up 77 percent of teachers, on average, but 52 percent each of assistant principals and principals (Figure VI.7) (Folsom et al., 2015; Hollingworth & Dude, 2009; authors' calculations).[19] Nationally, 76 percent of teachers and 54 percent of principals were women (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a, b). These findings indicate that for women, potential barriers to advancement to the principalship arise before the assistant principal position.

Across the four studies and analyses in Tennessee and Pennsylvania, the percentages of assistant principals who were women ranged from 29 percent in Iowa in 2008 to 65 percent in Tennessee in 2018. The lower percentage of female assistant principals in Iowa, relative to the other states, may reflect the earlier time period for the data as well as Iowa's more rural population. Two studies of administrative data from Iowa and North Carolina and analyses of administrative data in North Carolina and Tennessee indicated that the percentage of assistant principals who are women has risen over time (see Appendix B, Figure B.4).

Female assistant principals were more common in elementary schools than middle schools or high schools (McGee, 2010; Oliver, 2003; authors' calculations in Tennessee and Pennsylvania). These findings are consistent with the greater percentages of principals and teachers nationally in elementary school who are female, relative to those in other grades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, 2019).

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[19] An earlier study by Gates et al. (2004) of North Carolina found that in 2000, 57 percent of assistant principals and 48 percent of principals were women.

Figure VI.7. Women are underrepresented among assistant principals and principals, relative to their representation as teachers
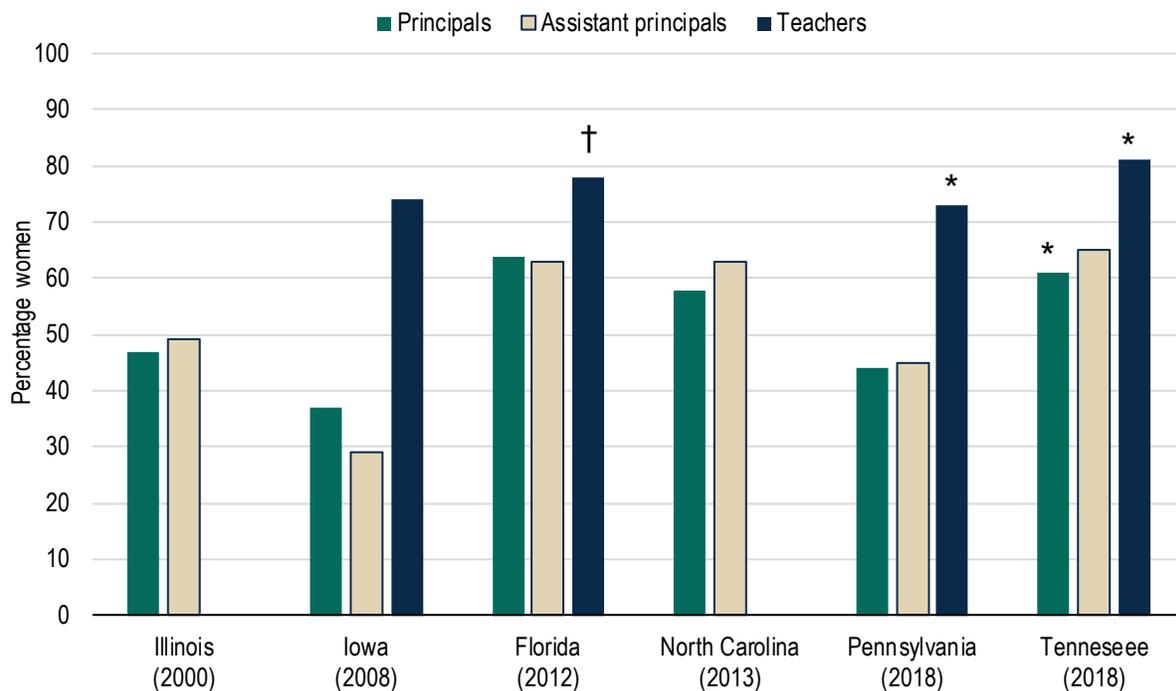
Source: Data from Illinois from Ringel et al. (2004); data from Iowa from Hollingworth and Dude (2009); data from North Carolina from Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom (2017); data from Florida from Folsom et al. (2015); and administrative data from Pennsylvania and Tennessee, 2018.

Note: Ringel et al. (2004), Hollingworth and Dude (2009), and Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017) did not test for statistically significant differences between groups. Figure does not include North Carolina data from Gates et al. (2004) because Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017) provide more recent data for North Carolina. Ringel et al. (2004) and Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017) did not provide data on teachers.

* Difference, relative to assistant principals, is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

† Difference, relative to assistant principals and principals combined, is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

There is consistent evidence that after graduating from principal preparation programs, women are less likely to advance to the assistant principal or principal position than men. Studies in Illinois, North Carolina, and Texas and analyses in Pennsylvania find that women were less likely to become assistant principals or principals than were men (Ringel et al., 2004; Fuller et al., 2019; Gates et al., 2004). In Tennessee, female teachers were just as likely to advance to the assistant principalship but less likely to advance to the principalship (see Appendix B, Figure B.7).

Among educators who become assistant principals, there is mixed evidence on gender differences in promotion to the principalship. In Texas, Bailes and Guthery (2020) found that female assistant principals were less likely and took longer to be promoted to become high school principals compared to male assistant principals. However, there were no gender differences in the promotion of assistant principals in North Carolina, Tennessee, or Pennsylvania (Gates et al., 2004; authors' calculations in Appendix B, Figures B.8 and B.9). In contrast, Ringel et al. (2004) found that, in

Illinois, female assistant principals were more likely to become principals than were male assistant principals.

Nationally, female principals are less likely than male principals to have assistant principal experience. According to the NTPS, in 2015–2016, overall, higher percentages of male principals had experience as an assistant principal than female principals (78 percent of male principals versus 76 percent of female principals; Figure VI.8). However, there were no significant differences in assistant principal experience among novice principals.

Figure VI.8. Female principals are less likely than male principals to have assistant principal experience

Source: National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools is 5,710 in 2015–2016. Estimates reflect the percentage of principals who held the position of assistant principal or program director before becoming a principal. Estimates are nationally representative. Novice principals are those in their first three years. Regression-adjusted estimates are presented for female principals in models that include controls for locale, region, school level, student enrollment, and percentage of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch.

* Difference, relative to men, is statistically significant at 0.05 level.

Gender differences in advancement along the pathway may be due to differences in tapping, mentorship, tasks, and family responsibilities or to discrimination

Evidence suggests that principals are less likely to tap female educators for leadership positions than they are to tap male educators. In Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Myung et al. (2011) found that male teachers were nearly twice as likely to be tapped

for school leadership positions as female teachers. In addition, both male and female principals were more likely to tap male teachers for school leadership positions, even after controlling for teachers' preparation for and interest in school leadership positions. In Tennessee, significantly higher percentages of male assistant principals than female assistant principals (82 versus 76 percent) reported that their current principal encouraged them to become a principal in the future, accounting for other differences between assistant principals, principals, and schools. These findings suggest that increasing the representation of women among principals might not necessarily lead to more female teachers or assistant principals being tapped for school leadership positions. Myung et al. (2011) indicated that these findings were also consistent with "glass elevator" theory of workplace promotions, in which men in female-dominated professions are "steered away from the female-dominated segments of the profession [like teaching] and pushed upward into positions of authority [like school leadership]" (p. 722).

Studies suggest potential explanations for gender differences in advancement, including access to mentorship, assigned tasks, family responsibilities, differences in aspirations or confidence, and discrimination. In Florida, survey data collected from 90 female administrators found that over the last 10 years of their careers, 37 percent reported barriers related to politics and "good ol' boys" networks, and 16 percent reported barriers related to employers' negative gender attitudes (McGee, 2010). Two administrators described in their responses that they had not been hired because of gender discrimination. Another administrator cited lack of mentorship, isolation, and being assigned the worst duties as why women do not move into administration.

> I really think women do not move into administration because they are not mentored or encouraged, and once they get in, they are once again on the outside…. There is no one to hang out with, no one to go to training with, no one to discuss ideas with…. You are very isolated. You are assigned all the duties that no one else wants, like bus duty, which means your day is the longest. They say women aren't in high school positions because of fights, but they don't hesitate to give you the duty that would require you to break up fights…. It is just an excuse.
>
> *(Study participant response in McGee, 2010, p. 15)*

McGee (2010) also found that many women delayed their administrative careers because of family responsibilities, staying in teacher or assistant principal positions longer until their children were older. These administrators rated personal anxieties about being a wife or mother and career woman as the top obstacle to their careers currently and as their second top obstacle within the last 10 years. They also perceived other family issues, such as childcare, spouse's career conflict, and their desire to start a family, as barriers to their careers. One administrator described how she delayed her career progression when her child was younger.

> I obtained my certification in Ed Leadership over the course of several years when my daughter was a toddler. Once she entered elementary school, I started the district process to enter the Assistant Principal pool. I waited until my daughter was in middle school before completing district process to be Principal.
>
> *(Study participant response in McGee 2010, pp. 10–11)*

One female high school principal noted that the time demands and family sacrifices are even greater at the high school level, providing one potential reason for why women are less likely to lead high schools.

Finally, McGee (2010) found that some female administrators in Florida cited lack of confidence, lack of assertiveness, and a reluctance for risk as barriers to their careers.

Other studies that compared women and men found no evidence of hiring discrimination or gender differences in aspirations or confidence (Bon, 2009; Eadens et al., 2012; Searby et al., 2017). One simulated experiment found no differences between principals' ratings of candidates for an assistant principal position with male- and female-sounding names (Bon, 2009). Two other studies found that women had similar aspirations for school leadership or stronger confidence in their instructional leadership skills than men (Eadens et al., 2012; Searby et al., 2017).

Key takeaways

Key takeaways on racial, ethnic, and gender differences in access to assistant principalship and principalship include the following:

- **Educators of color are more likely to become assistant principals and less likely to become principals than white educators.** People of color are underrepresented as teachers, assistant principals, and principals relative to their representation among students, reflecting well-known issues with diversity in the educator workforce and large demographic changes in the student population. People of color make up higher percentages of assistant principals than principals. These differences do not appear to entirely be explained by people of color being more likely to work in urban schools, where assistant principals are more common. Nationally, even accounting for differences between urban and rural schools, Black and Latinx principals and Black novice principals are more likely than their white counterparts to have experience as an assistant principal. The national picture is consistent with evidence from Texas that after completing principal preparation programs, graduates of color are more likely than white graduates to advance to the assistant principalship rather than directly to the principalship. However, findings from other states on racial differences in the advancement of principal preparation graduates to the assistant principal and principal positions are more mixed.

- **Women are underrepresented as both assistant principals and principals relative to their representation among the teaching workforce.** Women who graduate from principal preparation programs are less likely to become either assistant principals or principals than their male counterparts. Yet evidence is mixed on whether female assistant principals are less likely to be promoted to principal than male assistant principals. These findings suggest that for women, most of the "leakage" in the principal pipeline occurs before the assistant principal position.[20] Female assistant principals are more common in

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[20] We note here again that teachers' salaries are increased after obtaining a master's degree under traditional teacher salary schedules in most states (Hanushek, 2007). This policy has been criticized as incentivizing teachers to obtain a

elementary schools than middle schools or high schools, consistent with higher percentages of female principals and teachers in elementary school.

- **Reasons for these racial, ethnic, and gender differences are complex, and research on assistant principals only begins to scratch the surface of these complexities.** For people of color, a few studies on assistant principals suggest that differences in access to mentorship and hiring discrimination likely play a role. For women, studies suggest that differences in tapping, mentorship, hiring discrimination, and the time demands of administration (and how this interacts with family responsibilities) could play a role. These findings are consistent with the broader literature on racial, ethnic, and gender disparities in employment, bolstering confidence in these explanations (Altonji & Blank, 1999; Neumark, 2018; Quillian et al., 2017).

Questions for future research

- **Is the additional experience that people of color have as assistant principals beneficial, leading to better preparation for and performance as principal? Or is it detrimental, lengthening educators' ascent to the principalship or leading them to exit the profession before they have the opportunity for promotion?** Additional research is needed to understand whether the assistant principal position facilitates or impedes progress along the pathway to the principalship, particularly for educators of color.

- **To what extent do various factors—differences in sponsorship and tapping, differential access to mentorship, hiring discrimination, time demands of administration (and how this interacts with family responsibilities)—explain differences in advancement? How much do differences in advancement vary by locale and context?** Research to identify reasons and mechanisms driving inequalities is the first step in developing practices and policies to rectify them.

- **Do unique barriers exist at the intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender, such as in differential access to mentorship, sponsorship, and networking?** There is a need for research that examines how the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender work together to produce different outcomes. A few findings for Black and Latinx women highlight ways in which race, ethnicity, and gender intersect in regard to access to the principalship. Research should study these patterns and questions among larger numbers of educators.

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master's in educational administration with no specific intention of moving into school leadership (Levine, 2005). Teachers who have administrator credentials may have no have interest in school leadership.

Overall, there is a lack of research specifically focused on issues of equity as they relate to the pathway into the assistant principal position and then on to the principalship. Existing research does, however, paint a clear picture by describing patterns of underrepresentation at points along the pathway. These patterns call attention to the need for more research to explore the factors driving these differences. Understanding these factors can guide local and state-level efforts to advance equity.

VII. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL ROLE AND SCHOOL OUTCOMES? WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AS AN ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AND FUTURE PRINCIPAL PERFORMANCE?

Assistant principals, as leaders in their schools, are well positioned to make important contributions to school and student success. In addition, having experience as an assistant principal could better prepare principals to improve their schools' performance. However, there is limited evidence about the relationships between assistant principals and school outcomes (Clayton & Goodwin, 2015; Houchens et al., 2018; Keesor, 2005; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). There is also limited evidence about the relationship between experience as an assistant principal and principals' performance, as measured by their schools' success (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Bowers & White, 2014; Clark et al., 2009; Hitt & Player, 2018).

In this chapter, we describe evidence about how the assistant principal role relates to school outcomes. First, we describe how the number of assistant principals in schools, aspects of the assistant principal role, and the characteristics of assistant principals relate to school outcomes, based on existing studies and new analyses of data from Tennessee. Second, we describe how experience as an assistant principal and how specific aspects of that experience relate to principals' performance,

> **Box VII.1. Studies and data on assistant principals and school outcomes**
>
> *Eighteen coded studies*
> **Publication type**
> - 16 studies in peer-reviewed journals
> - 2 unpublished reports
>
> **Methodology**
> - 10 qualitative studies (6 case studies, 3 multiple interview /comparative case studies, 1 other)
> - 8 quantitative studies (2 descriptive, 4 correlational, 2 quasi-experimental design)
>
> *Data*
> **National data**
> - Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey (1988–1989 to 2015–2016)
>
> **State data**
> - Tennessee Educator Survey data (2017–2018)
> - Tennessee administrative data (2011–2018)
> - Pennsylvania administrative data (2011–2018)

based on studies and analyses of data from the nationally representative SASS/NTPS and from Tennessee and Pennsylvania. The studies and data described in this chapter are summarized in Box VII.1.

Evidence of a relationship between assistant principals and school outcomes is weak, but specific aspects of the role may be related to student outcomes

Principals and assistant principals believe that having assistant principals in schools supports effective school leadership. Two studies suggested that school leaders perceive that having too few assistant principals hinders effective school leadership (Fuller et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2008). In the 2018 survey of members of the NAESP, 62 percent of respondents reported that the number of assistant principals assigned to their buildings was not "adequate to ensure effective school leadership that meets the needs of all students" (Fuller et al., 2018, p. 25).

The report did not describe whether these perceptions differed based on the number of assistant principals in a school—31 percent of the schools had at least one assistant principal—or differed by other characteristics, like school size or measures of disadvantage. A qualitative study found that the principal of a small rural intermediate school in Texas "was concerned that with the absence of an assistant principal, he lacked the time '[he'd] like to be a better instructional leader'" (Nelson et al., 2008, p. 693).

No quantitative studies examined whether having any assistant principals in a school or the number of assistant principals related to school outcomes. This may be because it is difficult methodologically to credibly identify the effects of having additional assistant principals. First, given that districts allocate assistant principals based on factors that could independently affect school outcomes (like school size, student achievement, or programs the school is implementing), differences in the outcomes of schools with different numbers of assistant principals might simply reflect other differences in these factors. Second, because assistant principals' roles vary substantially, it may not be clear which school outcomes assistant principals would most directly affect and, thus, research should examine. Finally, other school staff, such as principals or teacher leaders, may influence the same school outcomes as assistant principals, making it difficult to attribute any differences in schools' outcomes directly to assistant principals versus other school staff.

Assistant principals could foster equitable environments through deliberate attention to cultural inclusivity in their daily work. Two studies demonstrated how common responsibilities of the assistant principal role, especially student discipline, could be carried out in ways that develop culturally responsive environments that value and are respectful of all members of the school community (Clayton & Goodwin, 2015; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). For example, Clayton and Goodwin (2015) recounted how two assistant principals used their positions as enforcers of student discipline to spend time understanding each student as an individual, bridging home and school settings, with the overall goal of improving the teaching and learning experience and students' relationships with teachers. A second study that shadowed a high school assistant principal committed to culturally responsive leadership found that the assistant principal regularly articulated the principles of this approach, modeling them in her interactions with students and staff (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). These principles include developing positive relationships with teachers and students, modeling culturally responsive behaviors, and uniting home and school cultures. She was consistently visible in classrooms and hallways, conducting collaborative walkthroughs in which she and a group of teachers observed other teachers' classes and reflected on what they saw, specifically attending to how teachers worked with minority students.

There is suggestive evidence that specific aspects of assistant principals' roles—such as coaching teachers or being visible in the classroom—or assistant principal effectiveness could relate to improved student outcomes and school climate. One rigorous study in a large urban school district found that PLUS—a program designed to improve assistant principals' instructional leadership skills—had a positive effect on students' English language arts achievement but no effects on students' math achievement,

teacher retention, or assistant principal retention or promotion (Master et al., 2020).[21] This study compared students whose teachers received coaching from assistant principals who participated in the program with students of comparable teachers who received the district's typical supports. It also compared teachers who received the coaching from assistant principals with teachers who did not. However, it is possible that there could be other differences between the two groups of teachers because assistant principals were encouraged to coach teachers who received less support from the district.

A repeated measures study of one assistant principal in a junior high school in the Midwest found that greater visibility of this assistant principal in the classroom was associated with a reduction in student disciplinary incidents (Keesor, 2005). When this assistant principal increased his or her presence in the classroom over a nine-week period, the school experienced a 25 percent reduction in detentions and referrals for classroom behaviors, relative to the previous nine-week period. The study estimated that this reduction in disciplinary incidents saved 31 hours of time processing paperwork, which the study author asserted could be spent leading instruction instead. This assistant principal used information from the daily classroom visits to make an average of five positive home contacts per day about students engaging productively, and teachers felt this assistant principal was highly visible and supportive.

Analyses in Tennessee suggested that assistant principals' effectiveness, as measured by supervisor evaluation ratings, was positively related to teachers' perceptions of school climate (Woo, 2020).[22] In schools where assistant principals had higher supervisor evaluation ratings (by one standard deviation), teachers reported significantly higher perceptions of school climate (by 0.04 standard deviations), even after controlling for other differences in school characteristics. The positive relationship between assistant principals' evaluation ratings and school climate could suggest that more effective assistant principals could help improve schools' working conditions, but it is also possible that assistant principals may be more likely to receive higher evaluation ratings in schools that have stronger school climates, even accounting for other differences between schools.

The relationship between assistant principal experience and future principal performance is mixed

Principals believe their time as an assistant principal was important preparation for the principalship. Six studies provided evidence that principals believed that assistant principal experience was important preparation for the principalship (Caruso, 2013; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fuller et al., 2018; Lee, 2015; Nelson et al., 2008; Parylo et al., 2012). In a 2018 survey of members of NAESP, 79 percent of principals reported that assistant principal experience was important preparation for the principalship. Furthermore, a survey in Virginia found that among different types of preparation and experience, principals and assistant principals reported

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[21] The Master et al. (2020) study was released after we finished our search, but it is described in the synthesis because of its importance.

[22] These analyses were conducted for this report and also included in a recent dissertation, Woo (2020), that focused on assistant principals.

that experience as an assistant principal was second only to teaching experience in having "much value" in helping them perform their jobs (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Figure VII.1).

Figure VII.1. Principals and assistant principals report that experience as an assistant principal was second only to experience as a teacher in having "much value" for performing their jobs
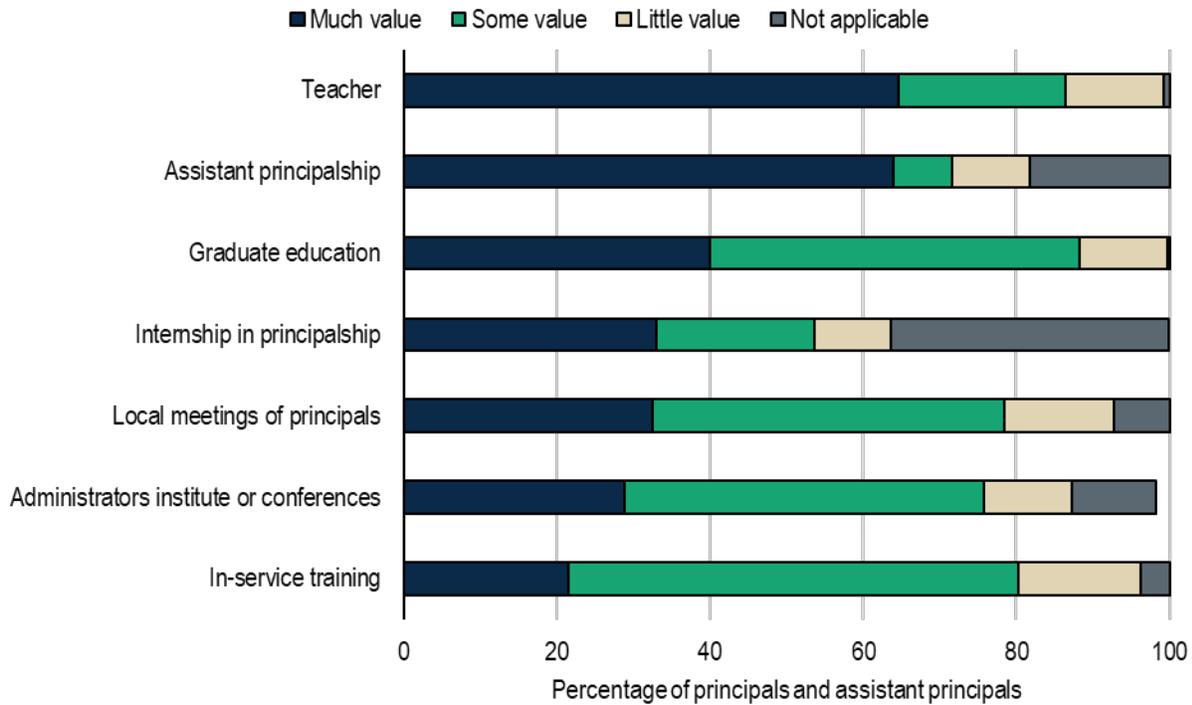
Source: Adapted from DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003).

Note: To focus the display, the figure excludes findings for state meetings, regional meetings, and national meetings of principals, which less than 19 percent of principals said had "much" value. In the study, the values for administrator institutes or conferences did not sum to 100 percent. The study did not report the year the survey was conducted. There was a 38 percent response rate, with responses from 1,543 principals and assistant principals.

A qualitative study of 11 principals from four districts in a southeastern state identified the importance of experience as an assistant principal in principals' narratives about their career paths.

In order to be a principal, you need to go through [the assistant principal] experience, and you need to have a lot of skill sets that assistant principals refine, and it prepares you for the principalship.

(Study participant response in Parylo et al., 2012, p. 576)

Likewise, in a qualitative study of novice principals in Texas, the principal of an urban elementary school also recounted the importance of prior assist principal experience.

You need to be in positions where you are being taught. [Serving as an assistant principal] was the ultimate experience where I had a principal who was teaching me.

(Study participant response in Nelson et al., 2008, p. 696)

Principals who had previously served as assistant principals in the same school or district reported that their existing relationships and familiarity with the context enabled them to more quickly implement their vision for the school (Caruso, 2013; Lee, 2015). In Chicago, one study interviewed three new elementary school principals who had previously served as assistant principals in their current schools and had specifically been "groomed" to become the next principal of their school (Lee, 2015). These principals reported that their experience facilitated a smooth transition to the principalship because they had already developed relationships and built trust with the staff, students, and community. Their familiarity with the school context allowed them to pursue strategies that aligned with the existing vision for the school and identify where improvements were needed.

> I knew the climate and the culture of the school…. I knew the people, I knew what the school's vision was, what we were working towards, what people were dedicated to accomplishing. So I think that went a long way because I was already part of that, so I didn't have to learn it and take the time to kind of figure out the culture of the school.
>
> *(Study participant response in Lee, 2015, p. 270)*

Similarly, in another study, one novice middle school principal in a suburban district in New Jersey emphasized the importance of his relationships with district personnel, which he developed while in the assistant principal role (Caruso, 2013). These relationships allowed him to assert his vision of change for the school without facing much resistance.

There is mixed evidence of a relationship between experience as an assistant principal and measures of principals' leadership practices, school climate, and principal and teacher satisfaction. One study of SASS data from 1999–2000, along with new analyses of SASS and NTPS data from 1988–1989 to 2015–2016 and new analyses of Tennessee data, found mixed evidence of relationships between experience as an assistant principal and principals' and teachers' perceptions of different school outcomes (Hitt & Player, 2018). Using the 1999–2000 SASS data, Hitt and Player (2018) found that, after accounting for other principal and school characteristics, principals with experience as an assistant principal were more likely to self-report facilitating a high quality learning experience for students and building collaborative processes and less likely to report distributing leadership, than other principals. However, there were no differences in principals' reports for other leadership practices: establishing and conveying the vision, building professional capacity, and connecting with external partners.

New analyses of SASS and NTPS data from the 1988–89 to 2015–2016 school years also generally found that, for novice principals, there was little relationship between previous experience as an assistant principal and principals' and teachers' perceptions of school climate and their job satisfaction, accounting for other characteristics of principals and their schools.[23] These findings on

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[23] For principals' perceptions, out of the combinations of outcomes and years examined, previous experience as an assistant principal had only one statistically significant negative relationship with school climate in one year (see Appendix B, Table B.3). Previous experience as an assistant principal had no relationship with teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction but a few statistically significant negative relationships with teachers' perceptions of school climate and aspects of the school, such as support of school administration, cooperative effort among staff, support from parents, and so on (see Appendix B, Tables B.4–B.6).

principals' and teachers' perceptions of school climate differed from findings from principals themselves who reported that their prior experience as an assistant principals was important for preparing them to be effective principals (Parylo et al., 2012).

Similarly, new analyses of Tennessee data also found no relationship between assistant principal experience and principals' effectiveness, as measured by their evaluation ratings from their supervisor. Neither having experience as an assistant principal nor the number of years spent as an assistant principal had relationships with the evaluation ratings of principals by their supervisors, after accounting for other characteristics of schools and principals (Grissom et al., 2020).[24]

One limitation of these types of studies and analyses is that relationships between assistant principal experience and outcomes could reflect other differences between principals with and without assistant principal experience that were not measured in the data. For example, principals who had no experience as an assistant principal might have been better prepared for the principalship (for example, due to stronger preparation programs or access to strong mentors as a teacher) and thus were able to directly advance to the principal position. These types of unobserved factors might counteract any positive relationships between assistant principal experience and outcomes.

Overall, experience as an assistant principal has little relationship with student achievement or student achievement growth. Findings on this relationship were inconsistent and sometimes mixed, both in the studies and in the new analyses of Pennsylvania and Tennessee data (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Bowers & White, 2014; Clark et al., 2009; Grissom et al., 2020).

One study that examined growth in proficiency rates for elementary and middle schools in Illinois found that experience as an assistant principal was significantly associated with greater growth in proficiency in Chicago but only marginally significantly associated with greater growth in non-Chicago districts, after accounting for other differences between principals and schools (Bowers & White, 2014). There was also evidence that, in both Chicago and non-Chicago districts, schools where principals had experience as an assistant principal had marginally lower initial proficiency than other schools. Thus, perhaps in Illinois, principals with assistant principal experience tended to take over initially lower-achieving schools, which could experience higher rates of "catch-up" growth anyway.

In contrast, a study of principals in New York City found no statistically significant relationships between principals' total years of experience as an assistant principal and students' math and English language arts scores, after controlling for principals' preparation and other school characteristics (Clark et al., 2009). Finally, a study of first-time principals in North Carolina found that principals' years of experience as an assistant principal had no relationship with math or reading scores in elementary or middle schools but had an inconsistent and mixed relationship with end-of-course exam scores in high schools (Bastian & Henry, 2015).

Similarly, Grissom et al. (2020) in Tennessee and new analyses of principals in their first three years in Pennsylvania also found few statistically significant relationships between assistant principal

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[24] These analyses were conducted for this report and also extended in a recent paper by Grissom et al. (2020).

experience and various measures of student achievement growth. The new analyses controlled for school and principal characteristics and examined measures such as math and English language arts proficiency, graduation rates, and school value-added (Grissom et al., 2020; Appendix B, Table B.7).

As discussed earlier, these differences in findings could reflect the influence of unobserved differences between principals with and without assistant principal experience. They could also reflect substantial variation in the roles and experiences of assistant principals included in the studies. This raises the question of what specific experiences as an assistant principal might be the most important preparation for the principalship.

Evidence on the relationship between serving as an assistant principal in the current school and school outcomes is mixed, but there is suggestive evidence of a relationship between serving as an assistant principal in a more effective school or being more effective as an assistant principal and school outcomes. One study found that novice principals who previously served as an assistant principal in their current school had better student outcomes than other novice principals, but another study did not (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Clark et al., 2009). In New York City, Clark et al. (2009) found that schools with novice principals who had worked as assistant principals in their current school had higher test scores in math and English language arts and lower rates of student suspensions than other schools with novice principals, after accounting for previous achievement and other school and principal characteristics. However, Clark et al. (2009) found no differences for absences. In contrast, for first-year principals in North Carolina, Bastian and Henry (2015) found no relationship between assistant principal experience in the current school and student achievement. Bastian and Henry (2015) also found little evidence of a relationship between experience working as an assistant principal in a school of the same level as their current school (for example, both schools being elementary schools) and student achievement.

Bastian and Henry (2015) also found that novice principals who served as assistant principals in more effective schools generally had higher student achievement in their own schools, after accounting for prior achievement and other principal and school characteristics.[25] The findings were not explained by assistant principals in effective schools being more likely to take over as the principal of those schools.

Finally, in Tennessee, Grissom et al. (2020) found that assistant principals' evaluation ratings were positively related to their evaluation ratings as novice principals. Novice principals who served as the assistant principal to a highly rated principal also had higher ratings. These findings suggest the importance of the quality of assistant principal experiences, though there was limited evidence of a relationship between these assistant principal experiences and novice principals' success in improving student achievement.

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[25] The study used school value-added and whether the school was in the top quintile of the school value-added distribution to measure the effectiveness of assistant principals' schools.

Key takeaways

Key takeaways on the relationship between the assistant principal role and outcomes include the following:

- **Both assistant principals and principals believe that assistant principals play an important role in effective school leadership, but there is only suggestive evidence of a positive relationship between assistant principals and school outcomes.** Studies have only examined a limited set of assistant principal roles and tasks, and most are based on a small number of assistant principals or one setting. One rigorous study provides evidence that improving assistant principals' instructional leadership, specifically coaching teachers, could increase student achievement. Another study found an association between higher visibility of an assistant principal in the classroom and improved student behavior. Two studies provide examples of how assistant principals' attention to cultural inclusivity in their daily work might foster equitable environments.

- **Principals also believe experience as an assistant principal is important preparation for the principalship, but overall, there is little evidence of a relationship between experience as an assistant principal and principals' success.** There are a few studies that suggest that specific aspects of a principal's experience as an assistant principal—such as serving as an assistant principal in an effective school or being a more effective assistant principal—could be related to improved student achievement.

Questions for future research

- **What assistant principal roles and leadership tasks are associated with improved student and school outcomes and more equitable outcomes?** To better understand how to best leverage the assistant principal role to improve school outcomes and advance equity, researchers can replicate and extend the few existing studies. A first step is for researchers and practitioners to develop conceptual models and theories of action to set forth hypotheses about how assistant principals might influence a broad range of outcomes for principals, teachers, students, and families, including student achievement, social-emotional learning, and school working conditions and culture. For example, research could consider whether assistant principals could alleviate stress on teachers from student and family needs, allowing teachers to focus on the instructional core. Researchers could consider how the role might strategically address educator workforce priorities, such as teacher shortages and principal attrition, through shared and distributed leadership models. They could also explore whether assistant principals could play a role in implementing practices to reduce racial disparities in school discipline.

- **What types of assistant principal experiences best prepare future principals to improve outcomes for students, teachers, and school staff and advance equity?** More large-scale longitudinal studies are needed that follow assistant principals in their roles and onward to the principalship. This type of research could shed light on how to better develop the assistant principal role to prepare future principals and would need to first

include a more thorough and specific understanding of the roles and leadership tasks of assistant principals.

- **What are valid and reliable measures of assistant principal effectiveness?** Research on assistant principals requires valid and reliable measures to assess what preparation experiences and leadership responsibilities are associated with greater effectiveness for assistant principals.

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VIII. LOOKING AHEAD: INSIGHTS FOR ADVANCING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

In this concluding chapter, we recap the main findings for each of the five research questions, summarizing what we know about the assistant principal role. We then pivot to make recommendations about setting an agenda for the assistant principal role, based on our interpretation of the research synthesis findings and supplemental analyses.

Key findings

How prevalent are assistant principals? Which principals tend to have experience as an assistant principal? The numbers of assistant principals, as well as principals with experience as an assistant principal, have been increasing over the last 25 years. The percentage of all U.S. public schools with assistant principals increased from about one-third in 1990–1991 to more than half in 2015–2016. Most of the rise in the overall percentages of schools with assistant principals is explained by a dramatic increase in the percentage of elementary schools with assistant principals. Given the growth in the number of U.S. public schools nationally, we estimate that the numbers of assistant principals in the United States increased from 43,960 to 80,590 over the last 25 years—growing nearly six times as fast as in the number of principals.

Schools in cities and suburbs have more assistant principals per student than towns and rural areas. In 2015–2016, for every 1,000 students, cities had 1.8 assistant principals, compared with 1.5 for suburbs, 1.4 for towns, and 1.2 for rural areas. Schools with assistant principals served more students of color than schools without assistant principals.

The percentages of principals with prior assistant principal experience also increased over the last 25 years. In 1987–1988, about half of principals in public schools in the United States had experience as assistant principals, but more than three-quarters of principals had this experience by 2015–2016. We estimate that over this time period, the numbers of principals with assistant principal experience grew from 39,100 to 69,600.

The growth in the numbers and percentages of assistant principals and principals with assistant principal experience underscores the importance of understanding how the assistant principal position can be designed to improve school outcomes and prepare future principals. Beyond some state policies that assign funding for assistant principals to larger schools, there is limited research on why schools have assistant principals and the decisions behind allocation and assignments to schools. No studies have examined whether assistant principals, in particular the most effective assistant principals, are assigned to the schools where they are most needed.

What are assistant principals' leadership roles? Most assistant principals undertake a mix of instructional leadership, management, and student discipline leadership tasks, although the allocation of time to these tasks varies, often assigned at the discretion of the principal. The assistant principal role is much more complex and nuanced than one framed as either focused on instructional leadership or discipline. There is much variation in the roles assistant principals undertake, and not

all assistant principals have responsibilities that might best prepare them for the principalship. Assistant principals appear to take on similar duties as principals, although assistant principals spend more time on some responsibilities, such as student discipline. State policy contexts may explain some of the variation in assistant principals' roles, and more recent data suggest instructional leadership is more of a focus than reported in earlier research. There are no unique professional standards for assistant professionals; states and districts mostly use the same standards and evaluation rubrics for both principals and assistant principals, contributing to the lack of clarity about the role.

Limitations in the research prevent a deeper understanding of the assistant principal role. For example, studies have measured assistant principals' responsibilities and allocation of time in different ways, hindering comparisons. No studies examine the roles of assistant principals who have different titles or labels, such as assistant principal for instruction or assistant principal for administration. Principals play a key part in determining assistant principals' roles, yet we know little about how principals decide to assign leadership tasks to assistant principals or how these decisions might be influenced by district or school contexts. There is also almost no research on how assistant principals interact with other school staff, such as teacher leaders and instructional coaches. Lastly, we need much more research about the relationships between assistant principals' roles; their background characteristics including race, ethnicity, and gender; and school contexts.

What is the pathway to the assistant principalship and from the assistant principalship to the principalship? There is widespread consensus that preservice programs do not specifically focus on training assistant principals, although graduates are more likely to initially serve as assistant principals, not principals. Most assistant principals start along the leadership pathway in preservice preparation for the principalship, and most graduates of these programs who move into school leadership initially serve as assistant principals. The pathway to these preservice programs and the assistant principalship typically begins when teachers are formally or informally tapped, or encouraged to consider moving into administration or self-nominate for administration. Importantly, most assistant principals aspire to be principals. Some districts have implemented principal pipeline programs that explicitly prepare teacher leaders for the assistant principalship and later prepare them to advance to the principalship. A handful of states have implemented differential or tiered certification for assistant principals and principals; however, there is no research on these policies.

Once on the job, assistant principals may participate in various types of professional development, mentoring, and networking activities. Assistant principals highly value these activities, particularly mentoring from their own principals. However, these supports are not systematically available to many assistant principals (such as those in rural areas or smaller districts). The research is unclear if these supports strike a balance between improving assistant principals' effectiveness in their current roles and preparing them for the principalship.

Studies provide limited information about the effectiveness of preservice preparation or professional development for assistant principals. Studies of specific programs often omit rich detail about program participants, context, and content, limiting comparisons across studies. There is no evidence about the effectiveness of different types of preservice preparation programs (traditional or

district pipeline) or program components (such as mentoring and coursework) for improving assistant principals' leadership skills. Similarly, there is no evidence about the effectiveness of professional development, mentoring, and networking for success in the assistant principalship or advancement to the principalship. Most studies mainly describe assistant principals' perceptions of these experiences. Current evidence provides little indication that principals are required or prepared to work with assistant principals to coach them for the principalship.

How does access to the assistant principalship and the principalship differ by educators' race, ethnicity, and gender? People of color make up higher percentages of assistant principals than principals or teachers, although people of color are underrepresented among educators, relative to the student population. There are no national studies on the demographic characteristics of assistant principals, including race or ethnicity. However, across six states, 24 percent of assistant principals were people of color, compared with 13 percent of teachers, 19 percent of principals, and 34 percent of students.

Nationally, principals of color are more likely to have assistant principal experience than white principals. These racial and ethnic differences are not entirely explained by people of color being more likely to work in urban schools, where assistant principals are more common. The national picture is consistent with evidence from Texas that after completing principal preparation programs, graduates of color were more likely than white graduates to advance to the assistant principalship rather than directly to the principalship. However, findings from other states on racial differences in the advancement of principal preparation graduates to the assistant principal and principal positions are more mixed.

Women are underrepresented as assistant principals and principals, relative to their representation in the teacher workforce. Across six states, women made up 77 percent of teachers, on average, but only 52 percent of assistant principals and principals. After completing principal preparation programs, female graduates are less likely than male graduates to advance to the assistant principalship or principalship.[26] A large study in Texas provided evidence that Black women are less likely to advance to the assistant principalship or principalship than white women. This highlights that intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender could differentially limit advancement along the pathway.

Research pointing to specific explanations driving these patterns for assistant principals is limited. Evidence suggests that for people of color, differences in access to mentoring and discrimination in hiring could play a role. For women, studies suggest that differences in tapping, mentorship, hiring discrimination, and the time demands of administration (and how this interacts with family responsibilities) could play a role. These findings are consistent with the broader literature on racial, ethnic, and gender disparities in employment, bolstering confidence in these explanations. Because the assistant principalship is a common stepping-stone to the principalship, it is important to understand how the role might limit or promote the advancement of educators of color and women along the pathway.

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[26] Studies used different methodologies, preventing us from calculating the gender gap across studies.

What are the relationships between the assistant principal role and school outcomes, and what is the relationship between experience as an assistant principal and future principal performance? There is limited evidence about the relationship between assistant principals and school outcomes and between prior experience as an assistant principal and future principal performance. Principals and assistant principals believe that having assistant principals in schools supports effective school leadership. However, there is insufficient research about which leadership tasks of assistant principals are most effective at improving student and school outcomes and advancing equity for teachers and students. Only two studies examined specific aspects of assistant principals' roles and these outcomes. One rigorous study found that improving assistant principals' coaching of teachers increased student achievement, supporting an increased instructional leadership role for assistant principals. Another study found an association between higher visibility of an assistant principal in the classroom and improved student behavior. Studies also described how assistant principals could work to foster equitable environments through attention to cultural inclusivity in their daily work. However, there is much to be learned about the roles of assistant principals in improving student and school outcomes and advancing equity for teachers and students.

Similarly, there is limited evidence about how prior experience as an assistant principal relates to future principals' performance. Principals believe that experience as an assistant principal was important preparation for them in their work as principals. However, several studies and analyses indicated that principals who previously served as assistant principals had similar performance to those that did not. Some aspects of prior assistant principal experience, such as serving as an assistant principal in a more effective school, could be related to improved student achievement, but evidence is still emerging. There is a need for many more studies, including those across more states and contexts, that better document assistant principals' tasks and preparation experiences. Such studies could examine which aspects of the assistant principal role (if any) are most important for improving their future performance as principals and advancing equity in the educator labor market or for students.

What is the state of research on assistant principals? Study topics on assistant principals vary widely. In many cases, there are few research studies on similar topics or settings. Research questions on the same topic use different measures or concepts, making comparisons and synthesis across studies difficult. Although many studies provide contextual information about study participants and research settings, this information is rarely analyzed or discussed in findings. Even when multiple studies focus on a specific subgroup of assistant principals, such as leaders of color, or a specific type of school, such as high schools, there is little overlap in the topic of the studies. One study may address the role of assistant principals of color, whereas another addresses the pathway to the principalship.

The quality of the research studies also varies widely. Some studies use multiple years of data and employ rigorous analytical methods to make well-founded claims; others, however, are weaker in execution. For example, some collect survey data from one point in time with low response rates and do not report differences between respondents and nonrespondents or potential biases related to these differences. Some studies provide detailed information about sampling procedures, whereas others do not describe how study participants are selected or provide other relevant background or

contextual information. Findings about assistant principals and principals are commonly combined as findings about "school leaders." More than 22 studies were excluded from this synthesis because they only reported combined data for assistant principals and principals. These limitations often obscure important research results on assistant principals.

The research base is dominated by surveys and interviews in a single locale. Data collection methods can be diversified with approaches such as time use logs and comparing self-reports with reports from others (for example, comparing reports of assistant principals and principals). Furthermore, researchers could use state administrative databases to address policy-relevant questions (for example, about tiered certification) across multiple states.

Qualitative and quantitative studies can also inform one another. Case studies, for example, could offer insights to guide the construction of measures and generate hypotheses to be tested in larger scale quantitative research. Many of the quantitative studies present findings that could be further explored through qualitative inquiry to better understand the reasons for, or the mechanisms that might explain patterns in the quantitative findings. For example, quantitative research suggests that nationally, principals of color are more likely to have experience as an assistant principal than white principals. However, qualitative studies are needed to help explain why this pattern emerges. Case studies and interview studies could help tease out this phenomenon in much more detail through studying the in-depth career experiences of educators, both prospectively and retrospectively. Here, then, is the power of these approaches when used in tandem. Findings from quantitative research can be taken up using qualitative approaches to better understand processes, mechanisms, and nuanced interactions that can explain patterns of findings. However, we found few instances where studies were in conversation with one another.

Agenda for future research on the assistant principalship

- Why is the number of assistant principals increasing?
- Are effective assistant principals equitably allocated to schools?
- How do principals decide which tasks to assign assistant principals?
- How do assistant principals work with other school staff?
- What leadership titles denote the assistant principal role?
- What are the most effective approaches to prepare and develop assistant principals?
- Why are educators of color more likely than white educators to become assistant principals and less likely than white educators to directly advance to the principalship?
- Are assistant principals of color promoted to the principalship at the same rate as white assistant principals?
- How can experiences in the pathway from teacher to principal be more equitable for educators of color and female educators?
- Which assistant principal roles are most related to improved student and school outcomes?
- How can assistant principals best advance equity for students and teachers?
- What experiences as an assistant principal are most related to stronger principal performance, including in advancing equity for students and teachers?

Setting an agenda for reframing and redefining the assistant principal role

The research synthesis indicates that the assistant principal role is increasingly common, most assistant principals aspire to become principals, and principals report that serving as an assistant principal was useful preparation for the principalship. However, at the same time, assistant principals are given neither sequential, skill-building opportunities nor tailored evaluations. In addition, principals are not coached to develop assistant principals. Changes in the racial and ethnic composition of students have far outpaced the change in composition of those who teach in and run schools. As a link between teaching and the principalship, the assistant principal role is either a "choke point" for diversifying the principalship or a helpful gateway. Giving the assistant principal role the attention it deserves—by formalizing the role through standards consistent with the role's function as preparation for the principalship; developing specialized preparation, sequenced leadership tasks, and dedicated evaluation systems; and investing in more research—could help achieve two distinct goals for the role. First, it could ensure that the role better prepares future principals for the principalship. Second, it could advance equity by increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the principalship and improve how school leaders promote equity for students, teachers, and schools as a whole.

Our findings suggest an agenda for reframing and redefining the assistant principal role, despite the limitations of the research base. We pivot here to set forth an agenda to strengthen the role based upon our interpretation of the research findings. Specifically, we posit that the assistant principal role is well positioned to serve as a stepping-stone to the principalship; should be strengthened around instructional leadership tasks; and, with some strategic changes, could help to better prepare future principals and diversify the principal pipeline. Furthermore, as leaders in their schools and members of school leadership teams, assistant principals could perhaps play key roles in making the job of the principalship more manageable, thus creating better working conditions for teachers and leaders and even helping to stem the tide of educator shortages and attrition.

That said, we recognize that assistant principals exist within a broader context; their roles need to be flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of students, teachers, and principals. Formalization of the role could help strike a balance so that assistant principals meet the needs of their local context while also gaining the experience and development opportunities to become successful principals.

How can the assistant principal role be a stepping-stone for preparing effective principals?

Currently, the assistant principal position is not explicitly designed to prepare effective principals. We suggest that a refocused role could provide dedicated and specific opportunities to prepare future candidates for the principalship and improve the effectiveness of assistant principals in their current roles. Although some may surmise that this new emphasis could completely disrupt current assistant principal responsibilities, we do not suggest that assistant principals be removed from their current roles and responsibilities as members of their school's leadership teams and as allocated by school principals. We do think that these roles and responsibilities can be simultaneously designed to more thoughtfully and equitably prepare assistant principals to move along the pathway to the principalship. For some districts, this might be heavier lift than for others, especially if assistant

principals have limited opportunities around instructional leadership. In some cases, assistant principals might benefit from professional development offered to principals given the overlap in leadership responsibilities. Much can be learned from districts that have already implemented principal pipelines as they develop the assistant principal position to prepare assistant principals for principalship (Turnbull et al., 2015, 2016).

Others may be concerned about this change, especially if there are not as many principal slots available as the number of assistant principals who aspire to that job. If there are far fewer principal openings than there are assistant principals, is setting up the job as a principal pathway creating the possibility of faulty expectations and disappointments for current and future assistant principals? As noted in the research synthesis findings, most assistant principals already do in fact aspire to become principals, so they may be well aware of, and unlikely to be discouraged by, the numbers of possible principal openings. Furthermore, in filling principal positions, prior experience as an assistant principal is viewed as providing valuable leadership experience to those stepping into the principal role.

We assert the evidence also begins to suggest that the assistant principal role needs to be more focused on instructional leadership both to better attract candidates to the role and to prepare them for the principalship. In some states, the role has already shifted to more direct involvement in instructional leadership because of new state policies, such as mandated teacher evaluations and observations. In addition, one study on the hiring of assistant principals found that they preferred jobs that focused on instructional leadership over those that emphasize discipline, which also suggests that assistant principals may prefer a shift to more instructional leadership. One of the more rigorous studies also found the assistant principals who were provided professional development to improve their instructional leadership had a positive effect on student achievement in English language arts (Masters et al., 2020). Through the instructional leadership role and in close working relationships with student and teachers, assistant principals, with appropriate training and support, could advance equity in their schools.

Intentionally designing the assistant principal role as a step along a pathway to the principalship, with added emphases on instructional leadership and equity, could involve the following:

- **Develop standards for assistant principals that are consistent with the role's function as preparation for the principalship.** Developing standards that identify competencies for assistant principals' primary responsibilities would allow assistant principals to gain experience needed for success as a principal. Assistant principals' standards should explicitly include instructional leadership such as coaching and providing feedback to teachers, alongside other tasks, given the importance of instructional leadership for highly effective principals (Grissom et al., 2021).

- **Implement developmental, sequenced leadership tasks and opportunities for assistant principals aligned with the standards.** Designating a set of leadership tasks for assistant principals, with training and ongoing support for mastery of each of the tasks, could help assistant principals move progressively toward the principalship.

- **Articulate in job descriptions that the intent of the assistant principal role also includes preparation for the principalship**. Job descriptions should include explicit language that the assistant principal position is a step along the pathway to the principalship.

- **Provide principals with professional development on how to mentor assistant principals and delegate leadership tasks to help them grow and advance.** Clarifying the roles of principals and other central office staff and providing training to principals would help make principals' work with assistant principals more systematic and focused on the competencies needed for success in the principalship. This skill set can also be included in principal standards and job descriptions.

- **Implement unique systems of evaluation for assistant principals.** Evaluations can provide valuable feedback to assistant principals about their effectiveness and areas for development. Evaluation processes could be tailored by identifying focal indicators and competencies aligned to the standards and articulating expectations for assistant principals to advance to the principalship. Evaluations could also provide important information for districts about strong candidates for open vacancies for principal positions.

- **Clarify policies around assistant principals**. There is little articulation or understanding of policies about assistant principals, including policies about how to assign assistant principals to specific schools and how funding is allocated to schools to pay for assistant principals. For example, policies could require that assistant principals be allocated to low-performing schools with greatest needs to help advance equity within states and districts.

- **Identify and expand ways to measure the impacts of assistant principals on students and teachers.** Researchers can expand studies to focus beyond student achievement into such areas as equity and social-emotional learning needs of students and staff. They can also examine assistant principals' influence on school climate and working conditions that are related to attracting and retaining effective teachers and staff.

Should districts and states create an assistant principal role that is a discrete career position for some assistant principals, rather than only a stepping-stone on the pathway to the principalship?

Little evidence suggests that districts should invest in developing a unique assistant principal role that is distinct from the role as a pathway to the principalship. At the same time, there is no direct evidence that a differentiated role would be ill advised. Rather, the overlap between the assistant principal and principal roles suggests that principals need administrators who can support the school across a broad range of leadership responsibilities.

Development of a unique position for assistant principals could entail two challenges:

- **Differentiate the role, not only from that of the principal but also from other leadership positions such as teacher leaders and instructional coaches.** Given the catchall nature of the assistant principalship, the limited research on how assistant principals interact with other school leaders, and limited research on how and why leadership work is distributed across

school staff, we find it difficult to determine the added benefits of a unique assistant principal role or developing separate standards, evaluation, and training for that role.

- **Design and implement preservice principal preparation programs for the unique role.** Most administration candidates attend principal preparation programs, even though many are more likely to serve first as assistant principals rather than as principals. Given the current landscape of preparation programs, it would be difficult and resource intensive to design and implement preservice preparation programs to prepare candidates for the unique assistant principal role.

How can the assistant principal role contribute to a more diverse and equitable pathway to the principalship?

Research suggests that addressing barriers to assistant principal advancement for educators of color and women may diversify the pathway to the principalship. Evidence indicates that educators of color are more likely to become assistant principals than white educators. It is not clear whether this additional preparation in the assistant principal role improves their success as principals and whether they receive access to the supports, such as mentoring, that might help their advancement. Female educators are less likely to advance to either the assistant principalship or principalship than male educators. There is also evidence that women of color face different barriers to advancement than other educators. Some studies provide evidence that assistant principals of color have less access to mentoring. Current research also suggests a relationship between race and ethnicity and the assignment of assistant principal duties.

Addressing potential barriers to advancement may require the following:

- **Develop clearer policies and procedures for advancement along the pathway.** The lack of clear policies and procedures can compromise equal access for advancement. Each step along the pathway presents opportunities for biases—whether structural or social—that alter career trajectories for women and educators of color. Although clear policies and procedures for advancement cannot alone eliminate inequity, they can reduce opportunities for bias. In addition, setting clear criteria around core competencies for the assistant principalship and principalship can help demystify the advancement process and make it more transparent.

- **Ensure equitable experiences in leadership roles while in the assistant principal position.** Creating policies and guidelines to ensure that all assistant principals have equal opportunities to experience a variety of leadership roles will help them develop competencies for the principalship. Developing these systems can help reduce bias by making clear to principals and central office staff that they need to provide opportunities for all assistant principals to take on varied leadership roles to prepare them to become principals.

- **Develop systems to ensure equitable access to mentoring and professional development.** Mentoring and professional development should be available and accessible to all assistant principals, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, and not based on individual preference or social networks. Developing expertise among principals and principal supervisors on how to

effectively coach assistant principals and prepare them to become principals is also important for reducing bias.

- **Collect and analyze data by race or ethnicity and gender in leader tracking systems.** Leader tracking systems, or data systems that track the background, career progressions, qualifications, and effectiveness of educators, can provide information about differential rates of hiring, promotion, and assignment of assistant principals to schools, including nominations for career advancement into teacher leadership roles and leadership pipeline programs via processes like tapping and sponsoring (Anderson et al., 2017).

- **Implement equity audits for district policies and practices to understand barriers to advancement and putting into place responses to those audits.** Districts can collect and monitor these data to identify and address inequality. School districts can use data systems to monitor how assistant principals' responsibilities and duties are assigned and whether there is equitable access to training and mentoring. These processes could also help identify and suggest how to counter the trends and biases that may result from tapping.

Summary

The state of the knowledge base on assistant principals has not grown in step with the increased prevalence of assistant principals, and there are significant gaps in our understanding of assistant principals, their role, and how they affect outcomes for students and schools. This report highlights the need to focus more on this increasingly prevalent yet often overlooked role. Indeed, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers can all contribute to the evolution of the assistant principal role. The topics addressed in this report can provide an agenda for reframing and redefining the assistant principal role.

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APPENDIX A.

METHODOLOGY

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This appendix provides additional details about the methodology for the research synthesis and new data analyses.

Systematic synthesis of research studies

As described in Chapter II, the systematic synthesis used a four-stage process that included preparing analysis plans, gathering and selecting studies, analyzing studies, and synthesizing studies. This section provides additional details about our approach to gathering and selecting studies.

Searching research databases and gray literature. We cast a broad net for searching databases and gray literature because of the comprehensive nature of the research questions—synthesizing and characterizing the research on assistant principals since 2000. The search terms used for databases are shown in Table A.1, and search strategies for gray literature from key organizations are shown in Table A.2. Before removing duplicates, we identified 1,903 studies: 1,733 from databases and 170 from gray literature. After removing duplicates from the databases searches, 1,683 studies remained. We saved all studies identified through searches to the reference management software Zotero.

Table A.1. Database search strategy

Database	Search terms and parameters	Records retrieved	Search parameters	Notes
Education Full Text/EBSCO	"DE 'Assistant school principals'"	26	English; 2000–present in a peer-reviewed document	Used database's thesaurus.
Emerald Insight	"keyword 'assistant principals'"	11	English; 2000–present; articles and chapters	No thesaurus; searched without quotes.
Emerald Insight	"keyword 'vice principals' and 'schools'"	149	English; 2000–present; articles and chapters	No thesaurus; searched without quotes; added search term "schools" to reduce numbers of irrelevant studies (went from 429 to 149).
ERIC ProQuest	"MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE('Assistant Principals')"	281	English; 2000–present in a peer-reviewed journal	Used database's thesaurus, which included search terms "vice principals," "beginning principals," "principals," "school administration."
ERIC ProQuest	"MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE('Assistant Principals')"	11	English; United States; 2000–present in peer-reviewed documents	
PAIS Index	"MAINSUBJECT.EXACT('Principals') AND 'assistant' OR 'vice'"	14	English; 2000–present, peer reviewed	
ProQuest Central Collection (education databases)	"MAINSUBJECT.EXACT('School principals') AND 'assistant'"	478	English; 2000–present; peer reviewed, source types: government and official publications, reports, scholarly journals, education databases (see notes)	Because some studies were not assigned locations and were erroneously omitted when specifying United States only, manually excluded non-U.S. studies using "location" filter for all foreign countries, rather than only selecting U.S.-based locales; "assistant principal" not in thesaurus.

Database	Search terms and parameters	Records retrieved	Search parameters	Notes
ProQuest Central Collection Education Databases	MAINSUBJECT.EXACT ("School principals") AND vice	138	English; 2000–present; peer reviewed, source types: government and official publications, reports, scholarly journals, education databases	Manually excluded using "location" filter all foreign countries. Did this rather than only selecting U.S.-based locales because some articles do not have an associated location; assistant principal not in thesaurus.
PsychInfo	MAINSUBJECT.EXACT ("School Principals") AND assistant OR vice	39	English; 2000–present; peer reviewed	"Assistant principal" not in thesaurus.
ScienceDirect	find articles with these terms "assistant principals" or "vice principals"	11	English; 2000–present; research articles	
ScienceDirect	find articles with these terms "assistant principals"	226	English; 2000–present; research articles	
ScienceDirect	find articles with these terms "vice principals"	281	English; 2000–present; research articles	
Web of Science Social Science Citation Index	(ALL=(assistant principals) OR ALL=(vice principals) AND CU=(united states)) *AND*LANGUAGE: (English) *AND*DOCUMENT TYPES: (Article)	68	English; 2000–present; refined by: Web of Science categories: (education educational research or economics or education special or public administration or social sciences interdisciplinary or political science or social issues or sociology or women's studies)	
Total		**1,733**		

Table A.2. Gray literature search strategy

Organization	Search terms and parameters	Records retrieved
Abt Associates	Searched site for "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principals" or "vice principal"; filter by focus = education; capabilities = research, monitoring, & evaluation; region = North America; type = articles + reports	0
American Institutes for Research	Searched site for "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals"; filter by topic = education; resource = report	0
Brookings Institution	Searched site for "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals"; filter by content types = report; start date = 01/01/2000	2
Chicago Consortium	Searched site for "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principals" or "vice principal"	65
Consortium for Policy Research in Education	Searched under publications for "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals"	0
Institute of Education Sciences	Searched under publications for "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals"	7
Learning Policy Institute	Searched site for "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principals"; filter by resource type = reports	0
Mathematica	Searched site for "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals"; filter by type = publication	4
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)	Searched under publications; NAESP's journal *NASSP Bulletin* is accessible via ProQuest, which was already searched in general lit search (see notes)	0
National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)	Searched under Publications, the NAESP research journal *Principal* is accessible via EBSCO. Search via EBSCO: journal = "Principal"; subject = "assistant school principals" from 2000–2019	11
National Bureau of Economic Research	Searched "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals" in research; filter by type of research output = working papers	18
RAND Corporation	Searched "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals"; filter by category = research	2
Regional Education Laboratories	Searched using the "REL Lookup"; search terms = "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals" (used both the any word and all words specifications); search for = publications, all regions, since 2000	0
SRI International	Searched "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals"; filter by sector = education and learning; publication type = article	0
Urban Institute	Searched "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals"; filter by type = publication	26

Organization	Search terms and parameters	Records retrieved
Wallace Foundation	Searched "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals"; filter by type = articles or reports	13
WestEd	Searched resources for "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals" and included everything not labeled a webinar	18
What Works Clearinghouse	Searched "assistant principal" or "assistant principals" or "vice principal" or "vice principals"; included everything not labeled a webinar	4
Total		**170**

Screening for inclusion/exclusion. We used a multistep process to screen studies based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria developed by the research team (see Figure II.2 in the report). When the coders were not sure whether studies met the criteria, they retained the study for the next round of screening.

We screened 1,513 studies from databases and 170 studies from the gray literature. Table A.3 provides overall information on the numbers of articles screened throughout, from the initial screening of title and abstract, to full text review, and during coding, including reasons for exclusion.

Table A.3. Reasons for the exclusion of studies

Reasons for exclusion	Database	Gray literature	Total
Country—not United States	605	4	609
Time frame	4	2	6
Population	641	101	742
Setting	98	6	104
Relevance	54	23	77
Publication type	279	36	315
Total studies excluded	1,457	160	1,617
Total studies screened	1,513	170	1,683

Note: Studies could be excluded for multiple reasons, so the total number of studies excluded is less than the sum of the studies across the reasons for exclusion. Studies that were excluded based on country were not screened for other reasons, so these studies are only included in the country row.

Screening on title and abstract. We read titles and abstracts to screen out studies that did not meet inclusion criteria (such as those based on country, language, and school type). Thus, if a study was excluded for country, it was not screened on the other criteria. To screen for publication type, we retained studies defined by Ulrichsweb as "refereed"—its terminology for peer review. Overall, we excluded 1,093 of the 1,513 database articles and 114 of the 170 gray literature studies based on the screening of abstract and title.

Gathering and screening full text studies. We used the full text to screen remaining studies that were not excluded based on titles and abstracts. During this process, screeners flagged many studies

for additional screening because of uncertainty about whether the studies met the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Because of the degree of uncertainty, and as an added quality check, the two lead researchers completed full text screening for all remaining studies, screening for both basic criteria and relevance. They screened the first 100 together, talking through their decisions. They then divided the remainder and screened them independently, discussing additional instances of uncertainty before making final decisions. In this step, the primary reason for exclusion was based on study population. Study authors often combined data from assistant principals and principals and provided findings on "school leaders." Therefore, findings could not be disaggregated and attributed to assistant principals. At the end of this stage, 78 database studies and 13 studies from the gray literature remained. Once all screening was complete, we combined studies from the database and gray literature searches and removed some additional studies as duplicates. During the coding process, we removed 22 additional database studies and four gray literature studies that did not meet inclusion criteria. Thus, 62 studies from the searches were fully coded.

Citation chaining and hand searching. We screened other publications throughout the process. We first set aside literature reviews and theoretical/conceptual pieces, given that the synthesis was focused on empirical research. However, we then reviewed references from these and gathered those studies for additional screening and review that could be relevant and met the basic screening criteria. In addition, we reviewed other nonsystematic collections of studies we had gathered or become aware of and compared these references to our list. Again, if studies had the potential for inclusion, we added these to our screening pool.[27] Similarly, we built in a process of nominating studies for citation chaining from studies during the coding process (see below for a description of the coding process). Coders tagged studies, and we scanned these studies' references to identify additional relevant studies.

These additional searches resulted in a list of 60 studies, which we screened using the same process as for studies collected through database and gray literature searches. We identified and coded 17 additional studies, bringing the total number of fully coded studies to 79.

Data analyses

The analyses used national data from the Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey (SASS/NTPS) and data from Tennessee and Pennsylvania. This section describes how schools in Tennessee and Pennsylvania compared with schools nationally, definitions of locales used in the report, definitions of survey indices used as outcome measures, and the regression models for the analyses.

Comparison of Tennessee and Pennsylvania to the entire United States

This report used data from Tennessee and Pennsylvania because of the study team's existing relationships with staff in those states. However, these states differ from the entire United States, so

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[27] After gathering these studies as potential candidates for inclusion, we only added them to the screening pool for further review after we verified that they were not duplicates of studies already captured through the database and gray literature searches.

findings for these states may not generalize nationally (Table A.4). For instance, both states have lower percentages of Latinx students and higher student enrollments than the national average.

Table A.4. Comparison of district and school characteristics of the United States, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania

Characteristics (percentages unless otherwise indicated)	All 50 states and Washington, D.C.	Tennessee	Pennsylvania
District enrollment			
Average number of students	3,102	6,863*	2,519
<10,000 students	94	87*	97*
10,000–49,999 students	5	11*	2*
>50,000 students	1	2*	0
School locale			
City	27	32*	20*
Suburb	32	16*	46*
Town	13	16*	10*
Rural	28	35*	24*
Type of school			
Traditional public school	92	94*	94*
Charter school	8	6*	6*
School enrollment			
Average number of students	551	573*	587*
Student race/ethnicity in schools			
Black	17	24*	14*
Latinx	22	10*	10*
White	53	65*	68*
Other race	10	4*	8*
Program participation in schools			
Free or reduced-price lunch[a]	54	41*	51*
Number of schools (range)	69,349–90,682	1,667–1,748	2,735–2,949

Sources: Common Core of Data, 2017–2018; Tennessee Department of Education, 2017–2018.

[a] For Tennessee, information about free or reduced-price lunch was not available in the Common Core of Data, so we used information on the percentage of economically disadvantaged students from the Tennessee Department of Education instead.

* Difference between districts/schools is statistically significant at the 0.05 level relative to schools/districts in all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

Definitions of locales

To examine differences across urban and nonurban districts and schools, we used the U.S. Census Bureau's definitions of locales, which are based on geography and population sizes. Multiple data sources use these Census definitions, facilitating comparisons across these sources. Specifically, the 2011–2012 and 2015–2016 waves of the SASS/NTPS and Tennessee and Pennsylvania administrative data used four locale classifications: city, suburb, town, and rural (Table A.5). Earlier waves of the SASS used three locale classifications: large/midsized city, urban fringe, and small town/rural. Table A.6 compares district and school characteristics for each of these locales. In particular, districts in cities and suburbs have larger student enrollments than those in towns or rural areas and have higher percentages of students of color.

Table A.5. Locale definitions

Census definitions	Definition
SASS/NTPS 2011–2012 and 2015–2016 and Tennessee and Pennsylvania data	
City	Territory inside an Urbanized Area (at least 50,000 people) and inside a Principal City (incorporated places with large populations of residents and workers within a metropolitan or micropolitan incorporated area)
Suburb	Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area (at least 50,000 people)
Town	Territory inside an Urban Cluster (2,500–50,000 people)
Rural	Census-defined rural territory (less than 2,500 people)
SASS 1987–1988 to 2007–2008	
Large/midsized city	Principal City of a metropolitan area
Urban fringe	Any incorporated place, census-designated place, or nonplace territory within a metropolitan area of a large or midsized city and defined as urban by the Census Bureau
Small town/rural	An incorporated place or census-designated place with a population less than 25,000 and located outside of a metropolitan area; any incorporated place or census-designated place or nonplace territory defined as rural by the Census Bureau

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2003, 2006).

Table A.6. District characteristics by locale

Characteristics (percentages unless otherwise indicated)	City	Suburb	Town	Rural
District enrollment				
Average number of students	5,958	5,694	2,147*	1,049*
<10,000 students	85	88*	99*	99*
10,000–49,999 students	13	10*	1*	1*
>50,000 students	2	1	0*	0*

Characteristics (percentages unless otherwise indicated)	City	Suburb	Town	Rural
Student race/ethnicity				
Black	38	13*	7*	5*
Latinx	28	19*	18*	11*
White	26	58*	68*	77*
Other race	9	10*	8*	8*
Student program participation				
Individualized education plan	14	15*	15*	15*
English learner students	12	7*	6*	5*
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	66	40*	53*	49*
Number of districts (range)	2,157–2,666	3,344–3,756	2,241–2,549	4,556–7,267

Source: Common Core of Data, 2017–2018.

* Difference between districts in various locales relative to cities is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Definition of survey indices used as outcome measures

To measure teachers' and principals' perceptions of school climate or job satisfaction, we constructed indices that summarize teachers' and principals' perceptions across multiple survey items that measured these underlying constructs. Constructing indices can reduce measurement error associated with individual survey items, leading to more precise estimates of relationships. It also reduces the number of outcomes in the analysis, limiting the possibility of finding many significant relationships simply due to chance. We constructed indices from items in the Tennessee Educator Survey and the SASS/NTPS.

Tennessee Educator Survey. In Tennessee, teachers reported their agreement (on a four-point scale) with 13 statements that measure school climate (Table A.7). For the analysis, following the approach used with the Tennessee data by Woo (2020), we combined these statements to create a standardized factor score with a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. The Cronbach's alpha (a measure of how closely related a set of items are that ranges from 0 to 1) is 0.93.

Table A.7. Tennessee Educator Survey questions that measure school climate

Survey question
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your school:
• I like the way things are run at this school.
• The staff at this school like being here.
• I feel appreciated for the job that I am doing.
• The staff feels comfortable raising issues and concerns.
• There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.
• Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.
• School leadership visible and available.
• School leadership seeks to understand the needs.
• Students treat adults with respect at this school.
• Staff have an effective process for making group decisions.
• The individual planning time provided is sufficient.
• Teachers in my school are allowed to focus on teaching.
• The collaborative planning time provided is sufficient.

Source: Tennessee Educator Survey data from the Tennessee Department of Education, 2017–2018 school year.

Schools and Staffing and National Teacher and Principal Survey. In these national surveys, principals and teachers reported agreement or disagreement with various statements that measure school outcomes, such as school climate or job satisfaction, on 1–4 or 1–5 scales (see Tables A.8 and A.9 for the questions in the most recent survey wave included in the analysis).[28] For the analysis, we averaged the responses to survey items in each group, reverse coding any negatively phased responses so higher scores correspond to better outcomes. Across years, Cronbach's alphas for the scales ranged from 0.71 to 0.94.

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[28] There are some differences in the questions included across various waves of the SASS/NTPS, although many questions remain the same.

Table A.8. Schools and Staffing Survey questions that measure principals' perceptions

Index	Questions
School climate	To the best of your knowledge, how often do the following types of problems happen at your school? (recoded so 1 = daily and 5 = never happens) • Physical conflicts among students • Robbery or theft • Vandalism • Student use of alcohol • Student use of illegal drugs • Student possession of weapons • Physical abuse of teachers • Student racial tensions • Student bullying • Student verbal abuse of teachers • Widespread disorder in the classroom • Student acts of disrespect for teachers • Gang activities
Satisfaction	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (recoded so 1 = strongly disagree with positive statement about satisfaction and 4 = strongly agree) • The stress and disappointments involved in being a principal at this school aren't really worth it. • The faculty and staff at this school like being here; I would describe them as a satisfied group. • I like the way things are run in this district. • If I could get a higher paying job I'd leave this job as soon as possible. • I think about transferring to another school. • I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began this job. • I think about staying home from school because I'm just too tired to go.

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey, 2003–2014 (for satisfaction question) and 2011–2012 (for school climate question).

Table A.9. Schools and Staffing Survey questions that measure teachers' perceptions

Index	Questions
School climate	To what extent is each of the following a problem in this school? (recoded so 1 = serious problem and 4 = not a problem) • Student tardiness • Student absenteeism • Student class cutting • Teacher absenteeism • Students dropping out • Student apathy

Index	Questions
	• Lack of parental involvement • Poverty • Students come to school unprepared to learn • Poor student health
Perceptions of school	To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (recoded so 1 = strongly disagree with positive statement about school and 4 = strongly agree) • The school administration's behavior towards staff is supportive and encouraging. • I am satisfied with my teaching salary. • The level of student misbehavior in this school (such as noise; horseplay; or fighting in the halls, cafeteria, or student lounge) interferes with my teaching. • I receive a great deal of support from parents for the work I do. • Necessary materials such as textbooks, supplies, and copy machines are available as need by the staff. • Routine duties and paperwork interfere with my job of teaching. • My principal enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it. • Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by teachers in this school, even for students who are not in their classes. • Most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be. • The principal knows what kind of school he or she wants and has communicated it to the staff. • There is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff members. • In this school, staff members are recognized for a job well done. • I worry about the security of my job because of the performance of my students or my school on state and/or local tests. • State or district content standards have had a positive influence on my satisfaction with teaching. • I am given the support I need to teach students with special needs. • The amount of student tardiness and class cutting in this school interferes with my teaching. • I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school. • I make a conscious effort to coordinate the content of my courses with that of other teachers.
Satisfaction	To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (recoded so 1 = strongly disagree with positive statement about school and 4 = strongly agree) • The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren't really worth it. • The teachers at this school like being here; I would describe us as a satisfied group • I like the way things are run at this school. • If I could get a higher paying job I'd leave teaching as soon as possible. • I think about transferring to another school. • I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching. • I think about staying home from school because I'm just too tired to go.

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey, 2011–2012.

Regression models

To examine relationships between the assistant principal role and outcomes, we used regression models to control for other potential explanations for the relationships (Equation 1).

$$Y_{ist} = \alpha + \beta X_{ist} + W_{ist}\delta + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (1)$$

This model examined the relationship between the outcome for educator i in school s in year t (Y_{ist}), such as school climate or student achievement growth at the principal's school, and the variable of interest (X_{ist}), such as whether the principal has assistant principal experience. It controlled for other educator and school characteristics that could explain the relationship (W_{ist}), such as student demographic characteristics, student enrollment, and locale. The coefficient β is the relationship of interest, α is a constant term, and ε_{ist} is the error term. For SASS/NTPS data, we weighted the regressions to be nationally representative.

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APPENDIX B.

SUPPLEMENTARY FINDINGS

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This appendix presents supplementary findings related to the prevalence of the assistant principal role, assistant principal role, experience moving along the pathway to the assistant principalship and principalship for educators of color and women, and the relationship between the assistant principal role and school outcomes.

Prevalence of the assistant principal role

Percentage of schools with assistant principals. Chapter III shows that the percentage of public schools with full-time assistant principals increased nationally over the past two decades (Figure III.1). We focused on describing trends for full-time assistant principals because the role of part-time assistant principals is not clear and less than 8 percent of schools in the SASS/NTPS in any year had part-time assistant principals. Consistent with the trends for full-time assistant principals, the percentage of public schools with either full-time or part-time assistant principals also grew (Figure B.1). Likewise, the percentage of public schools with full-time assistant principals in each locale and region also generally grew over this time period, although changes in the classifications of locales limit comparisons over time (Figures B.2 and B.3).

Figure B.1. Nationally, the percentage of schools with full-time or part-time assistant principals has increased over the last two decades
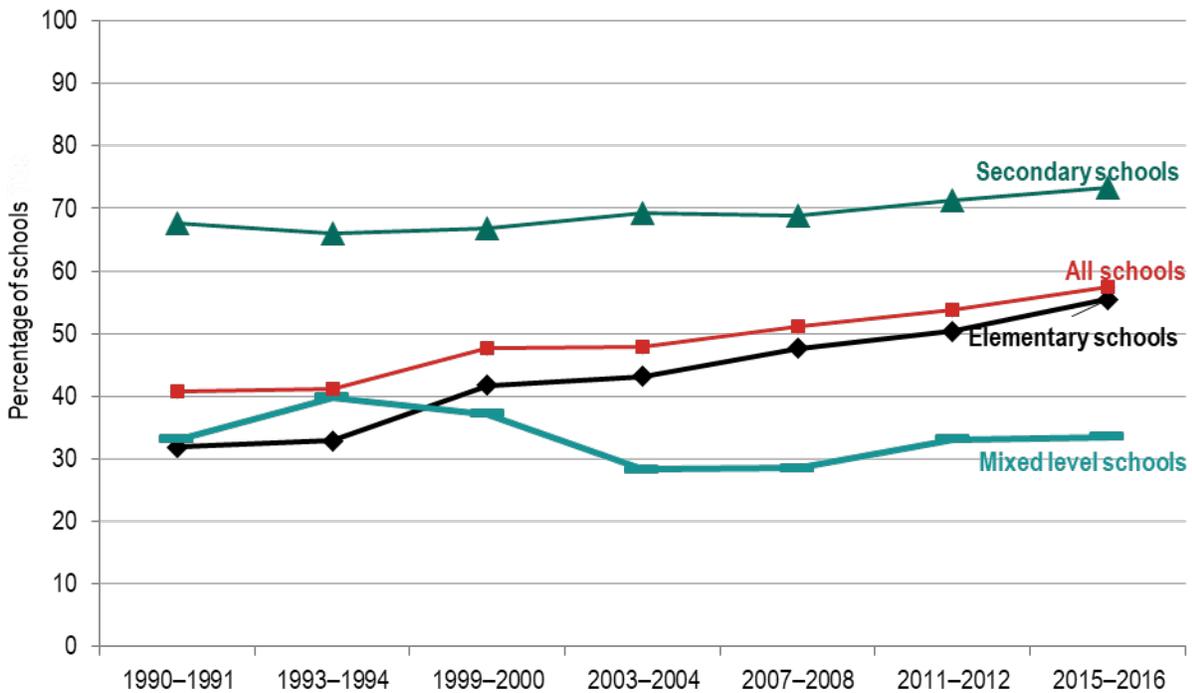
Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2007–2008, 2011–2012, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,970 in 1990–1991 to 5,770 in 2015–2016. Estimates are nationally representative. Data on whether schools had assistant principals were not available in the 1988–1987 Schools and Staffing Survey. Mixed level schools have both elementary and secondary levels, such as K–12 schools.

Figure B.2. Nationally, the percentage of schools with assistant principals has generally increased over the last two decades in all locales

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,970 in 1990–1991 to 5,770 in 2015–2016. Estimates are nationally representative. Data on whether schools had assistant principals were not available in the 1988–1987 Schools and Staffing Survey. The SASS/NTPS used three locale classifications prior to 2007–2008 and four classifications starting in 2011–2012.

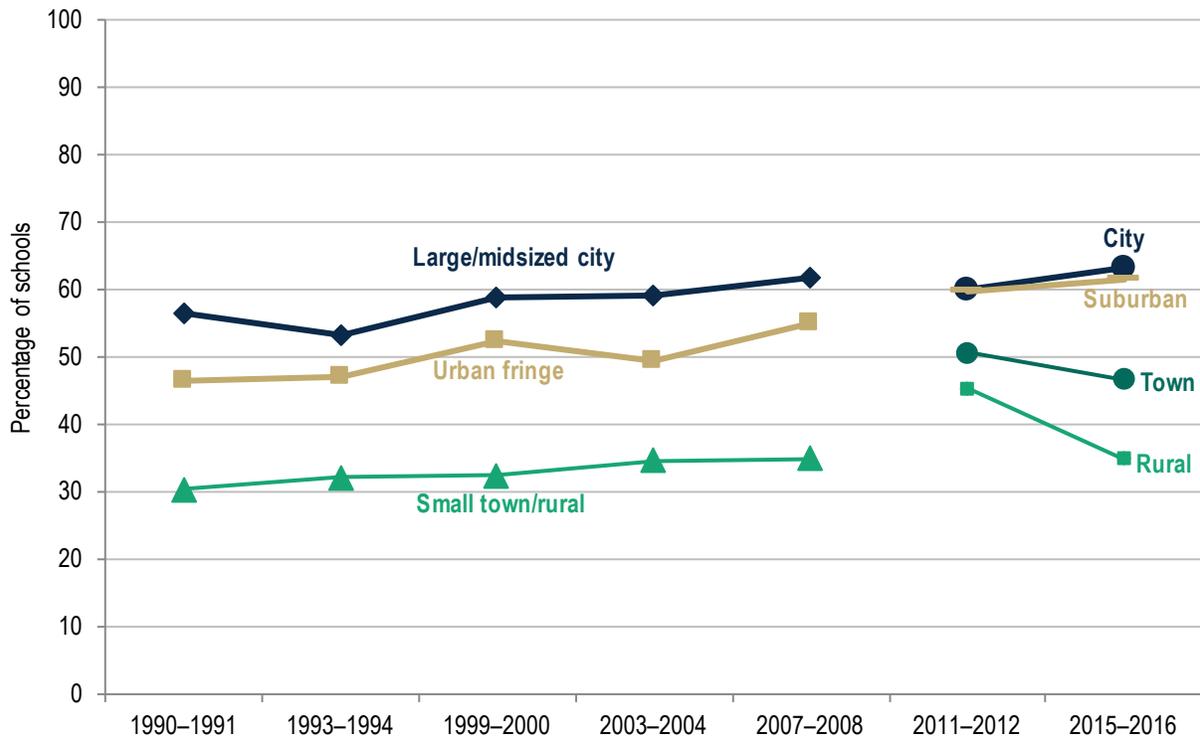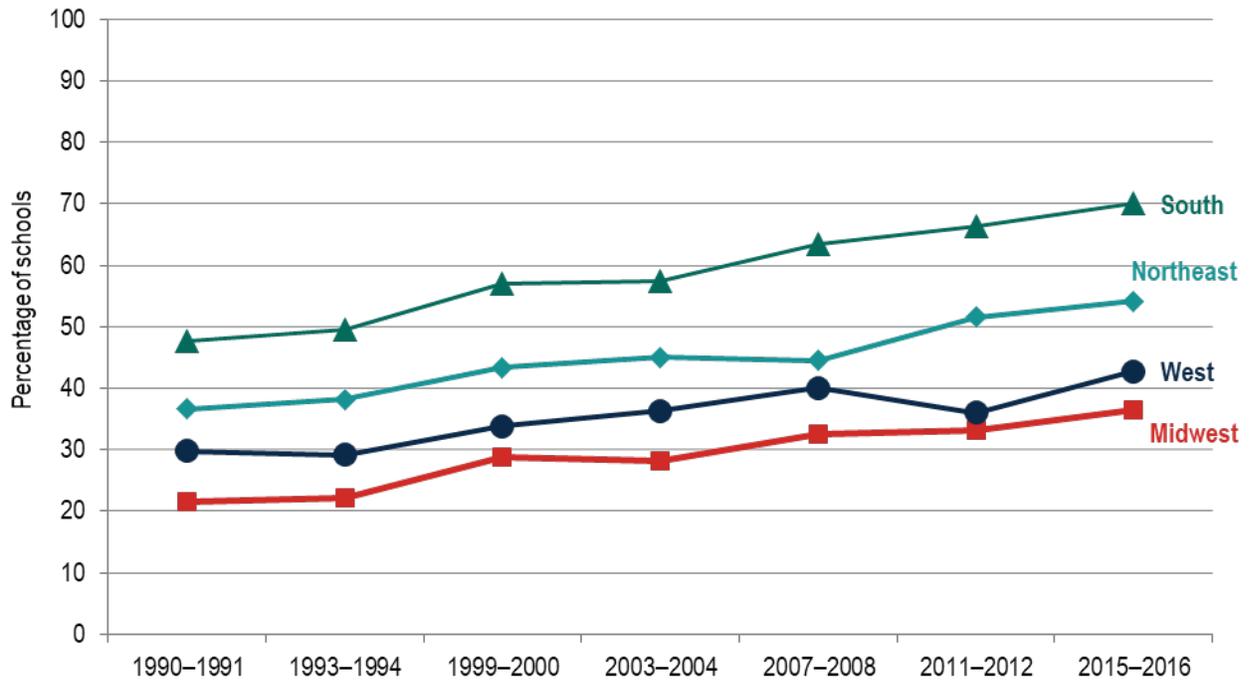**Figure B.3. Nationally, the percentage of schools with assistant principals has increased over the last two decades in all regions**

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2007–2008, 2011–2012, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,970 in 1990–1991 to 5,770 in 2015–2016. Estimates are nationally representative. Data on assistant principals were not available in the 1988–1989 Schools and Staffing Survey.

Characteristics of schools where principals do or do not have experience as an assistant principal. Nationally, principals who had experience as an assistant principal worked in different types of schools than principals without this experience, according to the SASS/NTPS (Table B.1). Principals with experience as an assistant principal were more likely than other principals to work in schools in cities, suburbs, the Northeast, and the South. They were also more likely to work in larger schools and schools with higher percentages of students of color.

Table B.1. Characteristics of schools where principals have experience as an assistant principal differ from those where principals do not have this experience

Characteristic (percentages unless otherwise indicated)	Averages for principals	
	With assistant principal experience	Without assistant principal experience
Locale		
City	30*	20
Suburb	35*	22
Town	13*	17
Rural	23*	41

Characteristic (percentages unless otherwise indicated)	Averages for principals	
	With assistant principal experience	**Without assistant principal experience**
Region		
Northeast	17*	14
Midwest	19*	40
South	40*	21
West	24	24
Student enrollment (average)	597*	370
Student race/ethnicity		
Latinx, any race	24*	15
White, non-Latinx	50*	65
Black, non-Latinx	17*	11
Other race, non-Latinx	9	9
Student program participation		
Individualized education plan	13*	15
Free or reduced-price lunch	55	54
Number of principals	4,120–4,430	1,180–1,280

Source: National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2015–2016.

Note: Estimates are nationally representative. There were no data available on the percentages of students who are limited English proficient or English language learners in 2015–2016.

[a] Survey asks whether the individual held the position of assistant principal or program director before becoming a principal.

* Difference between principals with assistant principal experience and schools without a full-time assistant principal is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Assistant principal role

Relationships between the assistant principal role and assistant principals' race and gender. Chapter IV describes suggestive evidence that the leadership tasks of assistant principals differ by their race and gender. In Tennessee, Black assistant principals spent more time observing instruction and less time on administrative duties than white assistant principals did (Table B.2). In Tennessee, female assistant principals spent more time observing instruction, on administrative duties, and instructional planning than male assistant principals did and less time on managing discipline, monitoring activities, and direct work with students.

Table B.2. Analyses of Tennessee data find some differences in the amount of time that assistant principals spend on leadership tasks, by race and gender (percentage of work time)

Role/task	Race		Gender	
	White	Black	Male	Female
Managing discipline	27.4	29.8	30.2	26.2*
Observing instruction	17.9	21.9*	16.6	19.2*
Administrative duties	16.1	12.5*	14.3	16.6*
Instructional planning	11.6	9.8	10.1	12.1*
Parent communication	8.4	8.6	9.6	7.8
Monitoring activities	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.6*
Direct work with students	5.9	6.6	6.6	5.6*

Source: Tennessee Educator Survey data from Tennessee Department of Education, 2017–2018.

Note: Navy shading indicates that Black (or female) assistant principals spent significantly more time on a task than white (or male) assistant principals. Teal shading indicates that Black (or female) assistant principals spent significantly more than white (or male assistant principals). The number of assistant principals who responded to this question is 709 overall, 637 for white assistant principals, 72 for Black assistant principals, 260 for male assistant principals, and 449 for female assistant principals. The survey asked educators: "In an average week, what percentage of your work time do you devote to each of the following activities?" The models controlled for assistant principal characteristics (race, gender, years of experience); student characteristics (race, gender, free or reduced-price lunch status, individualized education plan status); school characteristics (grade level, locale type, student enrollment); and principal characteristics (race, gender, years of experience).

*Significantly different at 0.05 level.

Experience moving along the pathway to the assistant principalship and principalship for educators of color and women

Percentage of assistant principals who are women. Chapter VI shows that women made up lower percentages of assistant principals and principals than teachers. Nevertheless, the percentages of assistant principals who are women increased over time (Figure B.4; Folsom et al., 2015; Gates et al., 2004; Hollingworth & Dude, 2009; Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017; Ringel et al., 2004).

Figure B.4. Percentage of assistant principals who are women has increased over time
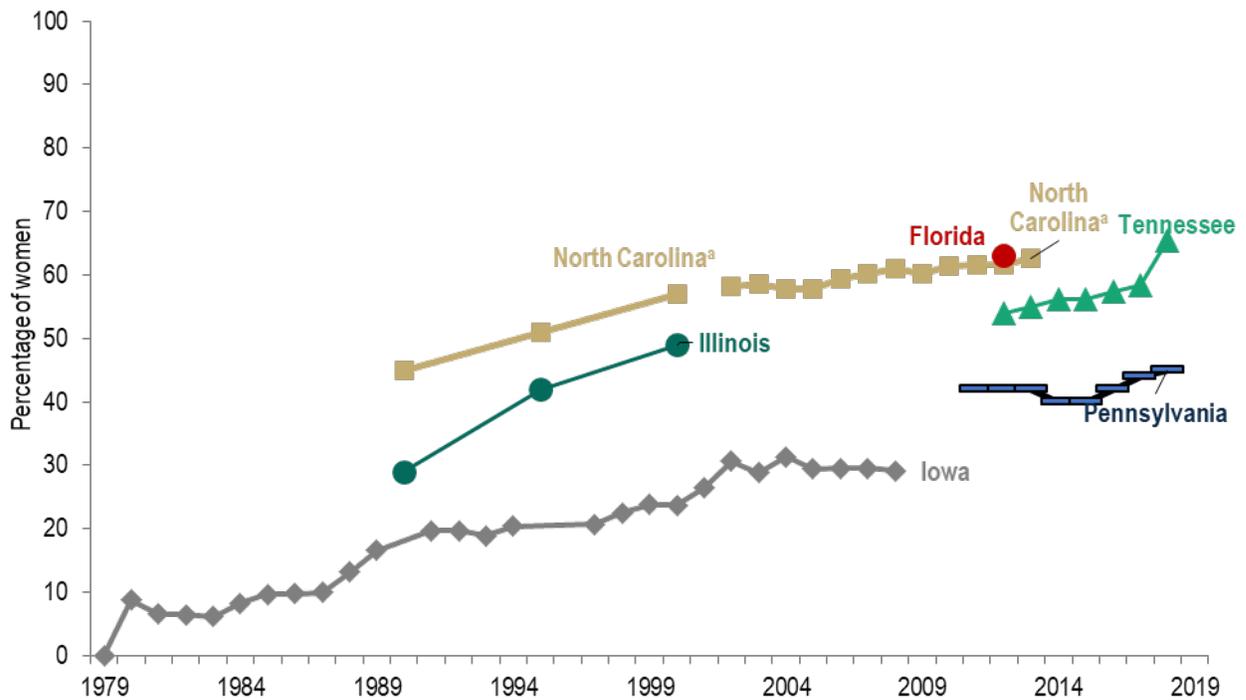
Sources: Data from Iowa from Hollingworth and Dude (2009); data from Illinois from Ringel et al. (2004); data from North Carolina from Gates et al. (2004) and Osborne-Lampkin et al. (2017); data from Florida from Folsom et al. (2015); and administrative data from Pennsylvania, 2011–2018, and from Tennessee, 2012–2018.

[a] Data from North Carolina from 1990 to 2000 are from Gates et al. (2004) and from 2002 to 2013 are from Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017).

Percentage of educators who advance to the assistant principal and principal position, by race. In Texas, several studies indicate that educators of color are more likely to become assistant principals and take longer to become principals after graduating from principal preparation programs (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Fuller et al., 2019). There were fewer racial differences in job placements as assistant principals or principals in Tennessee and Pennsylvania. In both states, similar percentages of white and Black first-time assistant principals advanced to the principal position over time (Figures B.5 and B.6).

Figure B.5. In Tennessee, similar percentages of white and Black first-time assistant principals advanced to the principal position over time

Number of years after first assistant principal position
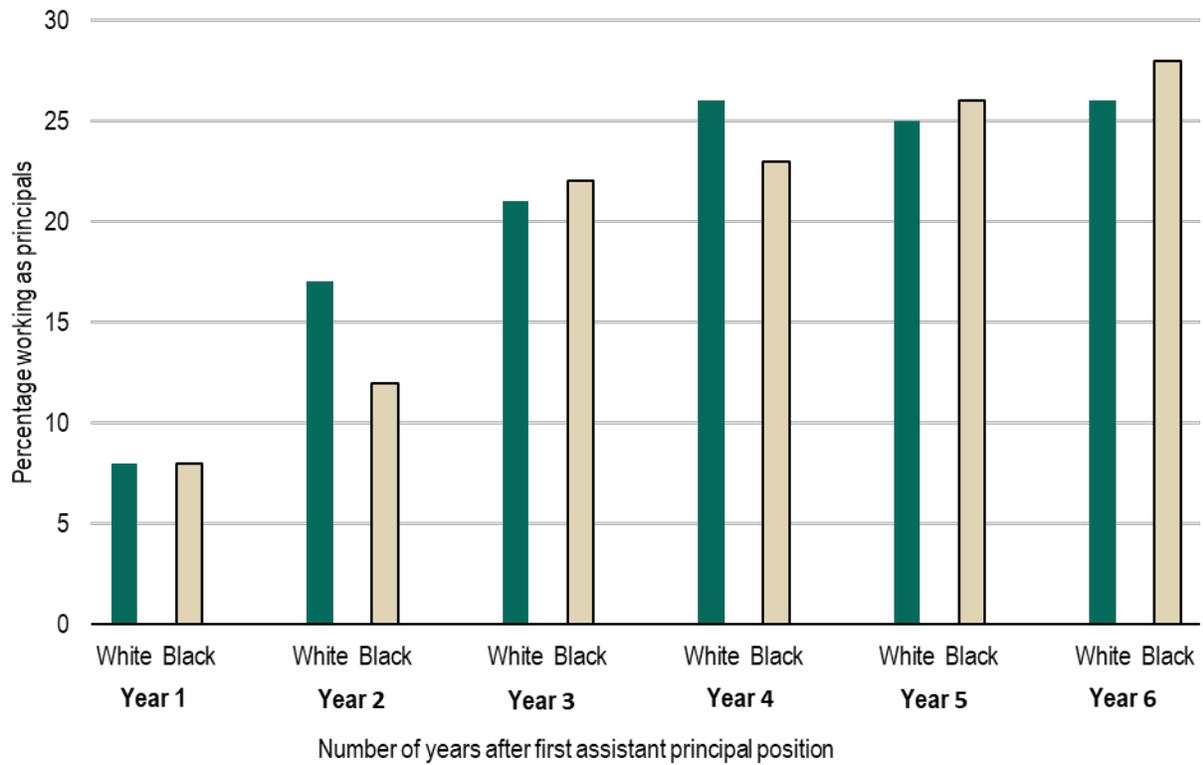
Source: Tennessee administrative data, 2012–2018.

Note: The figure includes 326 first-time assistant principals in the 2011–2012 school year. None of the differences between white and Black assistant principals are statistically significant.
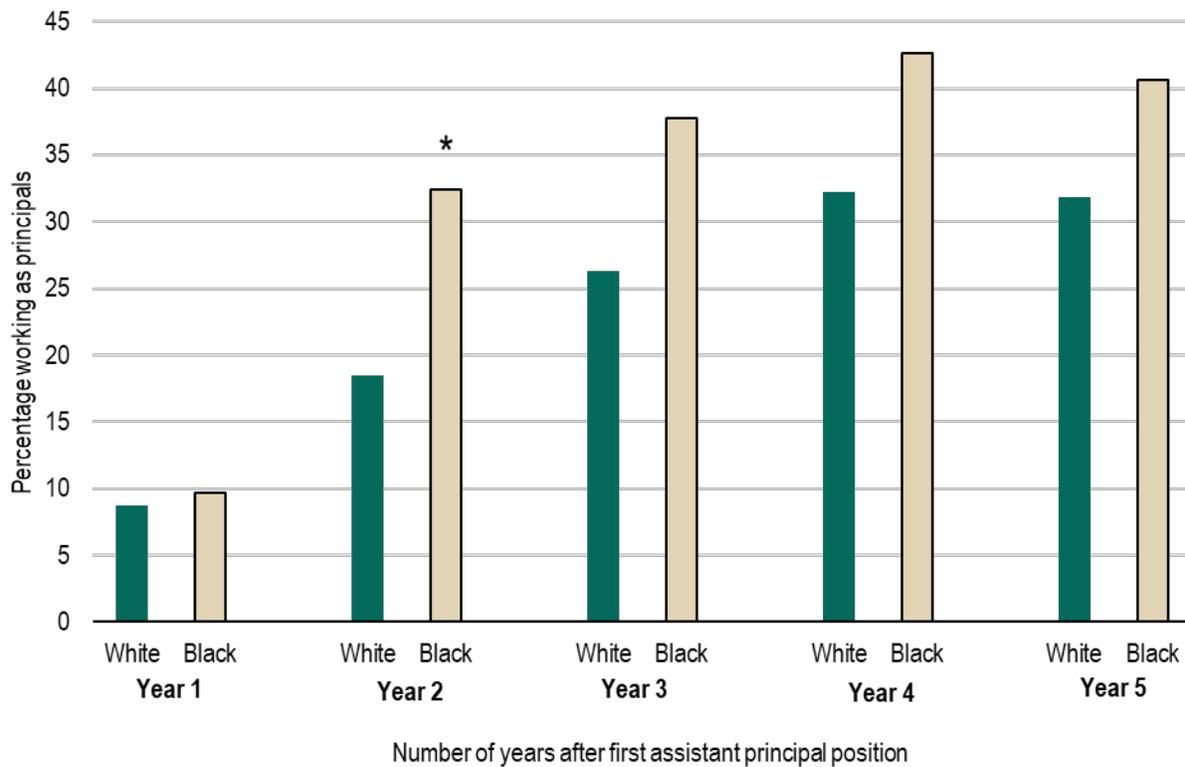
Figure B.6. In Pennsylvania, similar percentages of white and Black first-time assistant principals generally advanced to the principal position over time
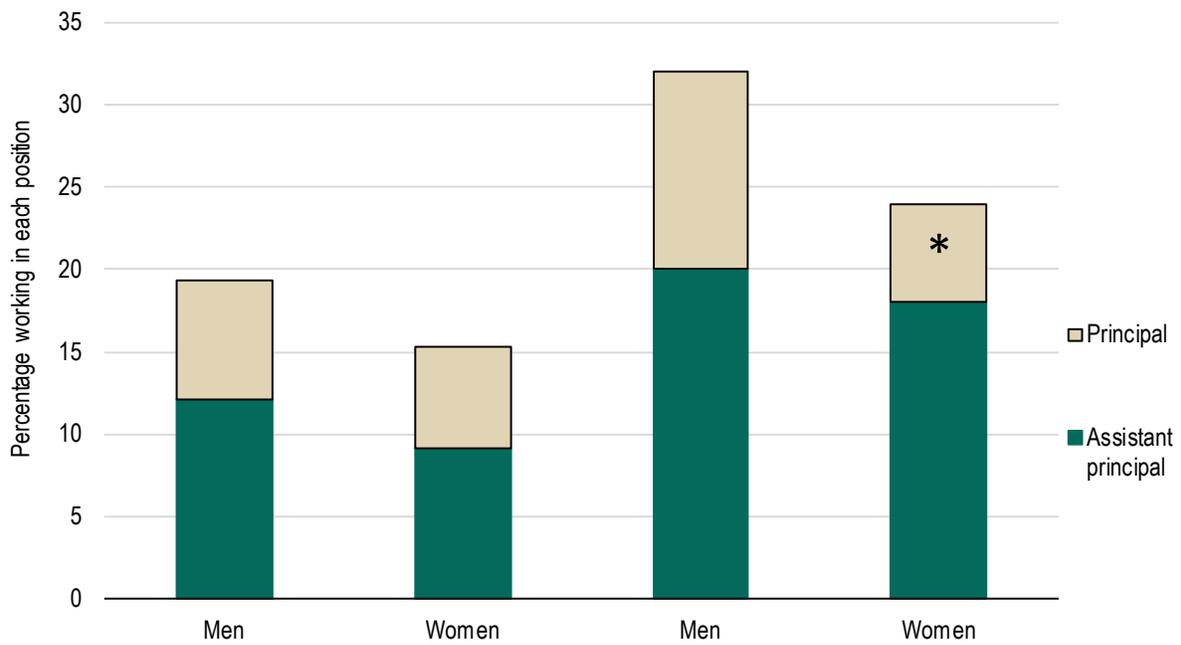

Source: Pennsylvania administrative data, 2012–2018.

Note: The figure includes 486 first-time assistant principals in the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years.

*Differences from white assistant principals is statistically significant at 0.05 level.

In Texas, several studies indicated that women were less likely to advance to the assistant principal or principal position than men (Bailes & Guthery 2020; Fuller et al., 2019). Analyses of administrative data in Tennessee showed female teachers were less likely to advance to the principal position than male teachers, but there were no gender differences in advancement to the assistant principal position; there were no gender differences in Pennsylvania (Figure B.7). Furthermore, in both Tennessee and Pennsylvania, similar percentages of male and female assistant principals advanced to the principal position within five or six years of their first assistant principal position (Figures B.8 and B.9).

Figure B.7. In Tennessee, but not Pennsylvania, female teachers are less likely to advance to the principal position than male teachers

Sources: Pennsylvania administrative data, 2011–2018, and Tennessee administrative data, 2012–2018.

Note: Based on the availability of certification and follow-up data and sample sizes, for Pennsylvania we examined four cohorts of teachers four years after receiving their administrative licenses, and for Tennessee we examined teachers six years after receiving their administrative licenses. The figure includes 660 teachers in Pennsylvania and 519 teachers in Tennessee.

*Difference from male teachers is statistically significant at 0.05 level.

Figure B.8. In Tennessee, similar percentages of male and female first-time assistant principals advanced to the principal position over time
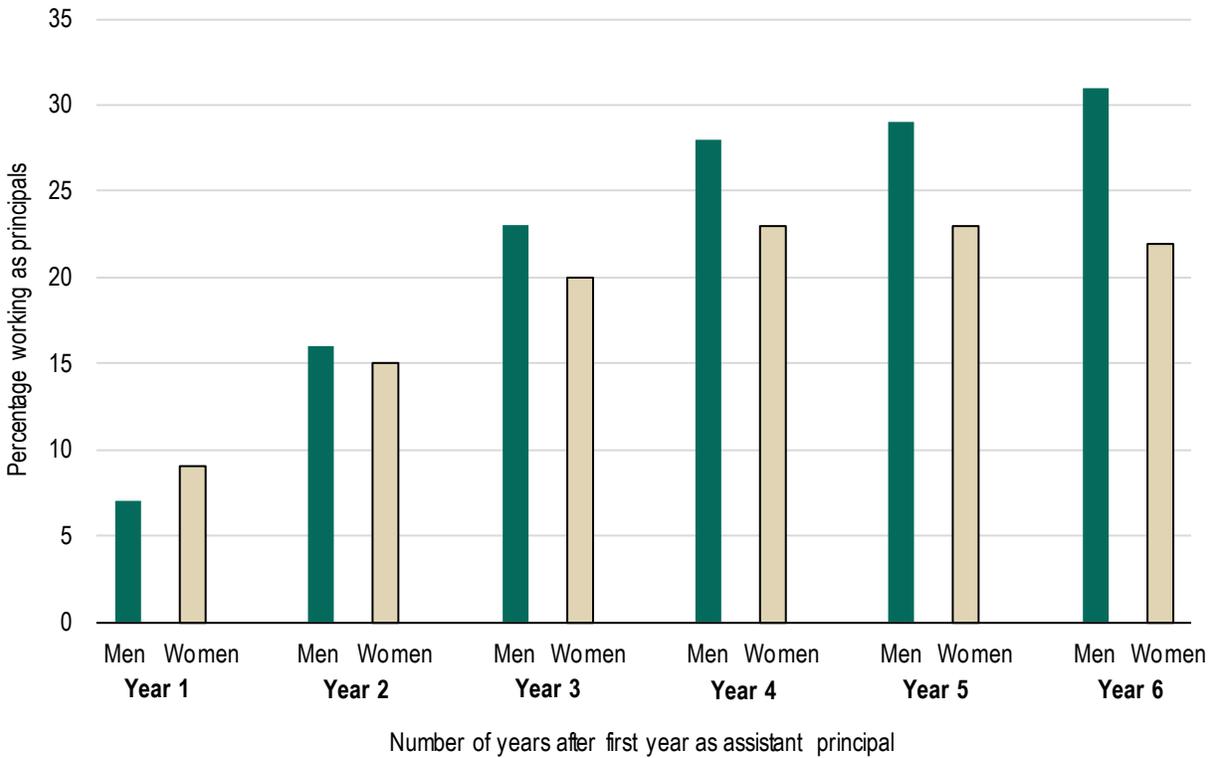
Source: Tennessee administrative data, 2012–2018.

Note: The figure includes 326 first-time assistant principals in the 2011–2012 school year. None of the differences between male and female assistant principals are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.
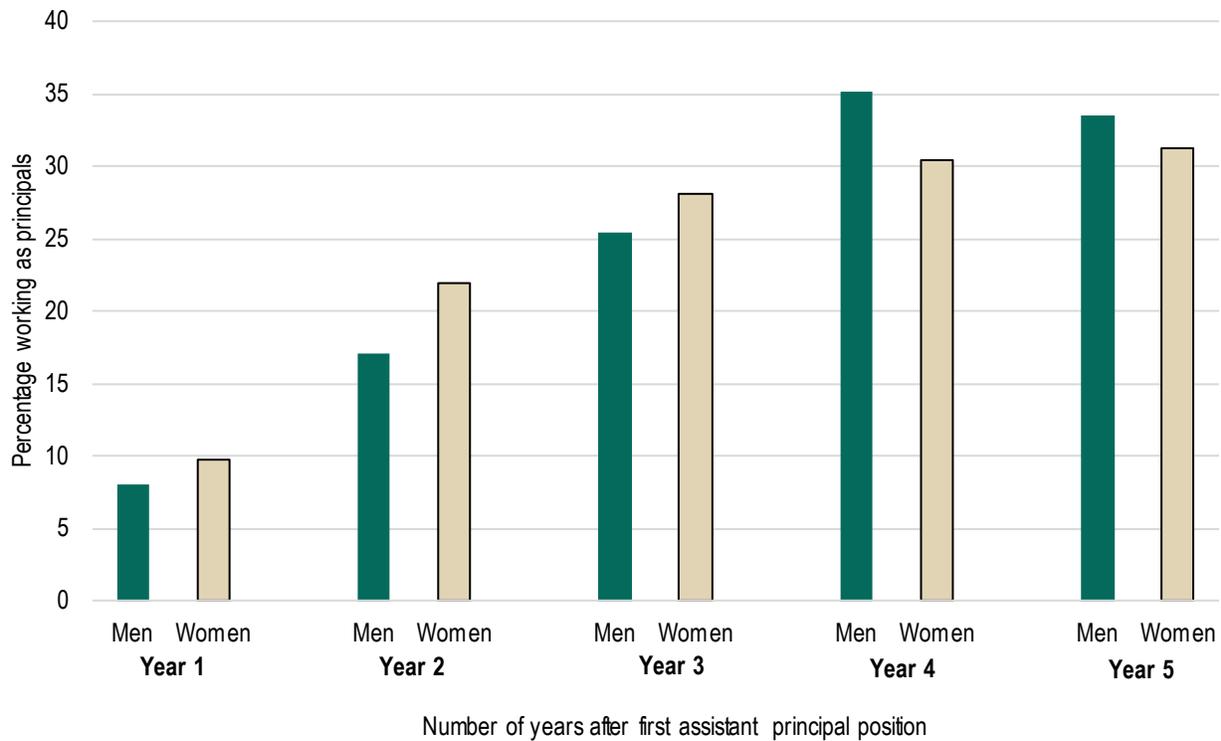
Figure B.9. In Pennsylvania, similar percentages of male and female first-time assistant principals advanced to the principal position over time

Number of years after first assistant principal position

Source: Pennsylvania administrative data, 2011–2018.

Note: The figure includes 555 first-time assistant principals in the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years. None of the differences between male and female assistant principals are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Percentages of principals who had assistant principal experience. According to the SASS/NTPS, higher percentages of principals of color than white principals had assistant principal experience in 2015–2016. These patterns have been consistent over time (Figure B.10).

Figure B.10. Nationally, principals of color have been more likely to have assistant principal experience than white principals over time
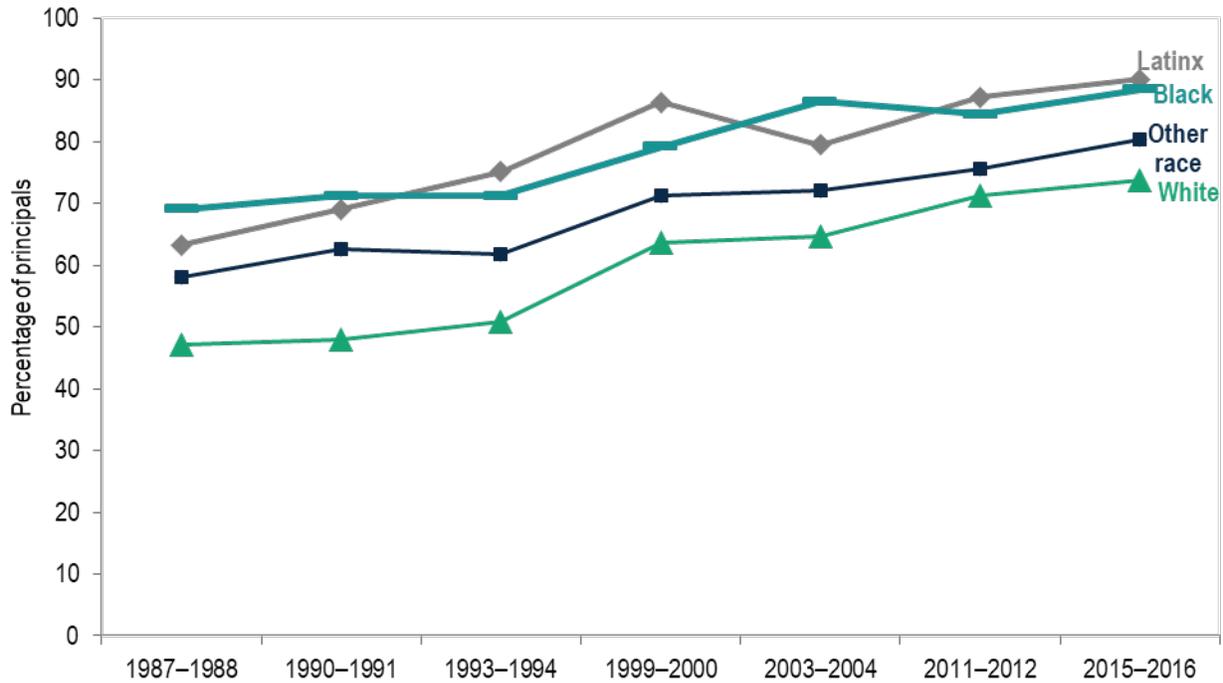
Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1987–1988, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2011–2012, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,520 in 1987–1988 to 5,710 in 2015–2016. Estimates reflect the percentage of principals who held the position of assistant principal or program director before becoming a principal. Estimates are nationally representative. Data on whether principals had experience as an assistant principal were not available in the 2007–2008 Schools and Staffing Survey.

[a] Survey asks whether the individual held the position of assistant principal or program director before becoming a principal.

Assistant principal role and school outcomes

Relationship between experience as an assistant principal and measures of principals' success. Chapter VII indicates that there is little evidence of a relationship between experience as an assistant principal and principals' success, as measured by school outcomes. Analyses of data from the SASS/NTPS showed few significant relationships between experience as an assistant principal and principals' and teachers' perceptions of school climate and job satisfaction (Tables B.3 through B.6). Similarly, analyses of administrative data from Pennsylvania showed few relationships between experience as an assistant principal and principals' evaluation ratings or measures of student achievement and student achievement growth (Table B.7).

Table B.3. Nationally, there is little relationship between experience as an assistant principal and principals' perceptions of school climate or principals' satisfaction

	School climate						Principal satisfaction
	1988	**1991**	**1994**	**2000**	**2004**	**2012**	**2004**
Experience as an assistant principal	0.0363	0.0363	-0.0985**	0.0065	0.0269	-0.0086	0.0515
	(0.0296)	(0.0276)	(0.0426)	(0.0281)	(0.0290)	(0.0309)	(0.0485)
Number of principals	1,410	1,720	830	1,790	1,870	1,600	1,870

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1987–1988 through 2011–2012.

Note: Table displays regression coefficients for the relationship between whether principals have experience as an assistant principal and (1) a 1–5 scale that measures school climate based on the extent to which principals report problems in the school (1 = daily, 5 = never happens), and (2) a 1–4 scale that measures the extent to which principals are satisfied with their jobs (1 = strongly disagree with positive statement about satisfaction, 4 = strongly agree). Standard errors are in parentheses. Analyses only include principals in their first three years of being a principal and are weighted to be nationally representative. Regressions include controls, as available, for principals' other experience and background characteristics (female, race/ethnicity, years of experience as a teacher, principal, or in other school leadership positions; education); controls for school and student characteristics (school level, charter school, school locale, geographic region, student enrollment, percent of female students, percent of students by race/ethnicity, percent of students limited English proficient, percent of students with individualized education plans, percent of students with free or reduced-price lunch); and controls for teacher characteristics (percent female, percent by race/ethnicity, average years' experience, percent with master's degree).

*Statistically significant at 0.05 level.

Table B.4. Nationally, there is little relationship between experience as an assistant principal and teachers' perceptions of school climate

	1988	1991	1994	2000	2004	2012
Experience as an assistant principal	0.0035	-0.0095	-0.0161	-0.0652**	-0.0100	-0.0405
	(0.0253)	(0.0183)	(0.0387)	(0.0249)	(0.0295)	(0.0412)
Number of principals	1,410	1,720	830	1,790	1,870	1,600

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey, 1987–1988 through 2011–2012.

Note: Table displays regression coefficients for the relationship between whether principals have experience as an assistant principal and a 1–4 scale that measures the extent to which teachers reports particular items are problems at the school (1 = serious problem, 4 = not a problem). Standard errors are in parentheses. Analyses only include principals in their first three years of being a principal and are weighted to be nationally representative. Regressions include controls, as available, for principals' other experience and background characteristics (female, race/ethnicity, years of experience as a teacher, principal, or in other school leadership positions; education); controls for school and student characteristics (school level, charter school, school locale, geographic region, student enrollment, percent of female students, percent of students by race/ethnicity, percent of students limited English proficient, percent of students with individualized education plans, percent of students with free or reduced-price lunch); and controls for teacher characteristics (percent female, percent by race/ethnicity, average years' experience, percent with master's degree).

*Statistically significant at 0.05 level.

Table B.5. Nationally, some negative relationships exist between experience as an assistant principal and teachers' perceptions of the school

	1988	1991	1994	2000	2004	2012
Experience as an assistant principal	-0.0187	-0.0196	0.00450	-0.00226	-0.0537**	-0.0474**
	(0.0182)	(0.0197)	(0.0354)	(0.0245)	(0.0242)	(0.0230)
Number of principals	1,410	1,720	830	1,790	1,870	1,600

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey, 1987–1988 through 2011–2012.

Note: Table displays regression coefficients for the relationship between whether principals have experience as an assistant principal and a 1–4 scale that measures the extent to which teachers have positive perceptions of aspects of the school (such as support of school administration, cooperative effort among staff, support from parents, etc.) (1 = strongly disagree with positive statement about school, 4 = strongly agree). Standard errors are in parentheses. Analyses only include principals in their first three years of being a principal and are weighted to be nationally representative. Regressions include controls, as available, for principals' other experience and background characteristics (female, race/ethnicity, years of experience as a teacher, principal, or in other school leadership positions; education); controls for school and student characteristics (school level, charter school, school locale, geographic region, student enrollment, percent of female students, percent of students by race/ethnicity, percent of students limited English proficient, percent of students with individualized education plans, percent of students with free or reduced-price lunch); and controls for teacher characteristics (percent female, percent by race/ethnicity, average years' experience, percent with master's degree).

*Statistically significant at 0.05 level.

Table B.6. Nationally, no relationship exists between experience as an assistant principal and teachers' satisfaction

	2004	2012
Experience as an assistant principal	-0.0366	-0.0402
	(0.0314)	(0.0384)
Number of principals	1,870	1,600

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey, 2003–2004 and 2011–2012.

Note: Table displays regression coefficients for the relationship between whether principals have experience as an assistant principal and a 1–4 scale that measures the extent to which teachers are satisfied with their jobs (1 = strongly disagree with positive statement about satisfaction, 4 = strongly agree). Standard errors are in parentheses. Analyses only include principals in their first three years of being a principal and are weighted to be nationally representative. Regressions include controls, as available, for principals' other experience and background characteristics (female, race/ethnicity, years of experience as a teacher, principal, or in other school leadership positions; education); controls for school and student characteristics (school level, charter school, school locale, geographic region, student enrollment, percent of female students, percent of students by race/ethnicity, percent of students limited English proficient, percent of students with individualized education plans, percent of students with free or reduced-price lunch); and controls for teacher characteristics (percent female, percent by race/ethnicity, average years' experience, percent with master's degree).

*Statistically significant at 0.05 level.

Table B.7. In Pennsylvania, little relationship exists between assistant principal experience and measures of student achievement and student achievement growth

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ELA proficiency					
Experience as an assistant principal	n.a.	n.a.	−0.00298	0.00969**	−0.00223
			(0.00406)	(0.00453)	(0.00545)
Number of principals	n.a.	n.a.	554	487	345
Math proficiency					
Experience as an assistant principal	n.a.	n.a.	−0.000624	−0.00587	0.00575
			(0.00345)	(0.00448)	(0.00410)
Number of principals	n.a.	n.a.	554	487	345
Graduation rates					
Experience as an assistant principal	0.00656	−0.0240*	−0.00133	0.0130	0.0119
	(0.0205)	(0.0125)	(0.0130)	(0.0149)	(0.0135)
Number of principals	163	160	148	135	90

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Math PVAAS					
Experience as an assistant principal	−0.391	0.429	0.0211	0.127	−0.585
	(0.351)	(0.371)	(0.315)	(0.332)	(0.387)
Number of principals	604	549	543	479	339
ELA PVAAS					
Experience as an assistant principal	−0.112	0.122	0.0735	0.177	−0.183
	(0.226)	(0.264)	(0.242)	(0.247)	(0.300)
Number of principals	604	549	543	479	338

Source: Administrative data from Pennsylvania Department of Education. 2011–2018.

Note: Analyses are restricted to principals with less than three years of experience as a principal. Regressions control for outcome in prior year, school characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, free or reduced-price lunch eligibility, English language learner status, school enrollment, charter school, and locale), teacher characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, education, and years of experience in education), principal characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, education, years of experience in education, and years of experience as a principal).

* Significantly different at 0.05 level.

ELA = English language arts; n.a. = not available; PVAAS = Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System.

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"This research confirms the need to reculture the assistant principalship in perceptions and practices. Assistant principals are poised and ready to assume deeper leadership roles in our schools. This report provides a roadmap for us to elevate the position, increase the impact of the school leadership team, and address the systems and structures that can enable assistant principals to offer their true strengths and full potential in the pursuit of increased student achievement and success."

Beverly J. Hutton, Ed.D.
NASSP Chief Programs Officer
National Association of Secondary School Principals

"School and student success depends on strong leadership teams, and that includes the role of the assistant principal. This report provides a strong foundation for what we know about the assistant principal role and more important, what we must learn to ensure that schools have the strong leadership that they need."

L. Earl Franks, Ed.D., CAE
Executive Director
National Association of Elementary School Principals

"This research recognizes assistant principals' complex role and gives it the attention it deserves by highlighting assistant principals as leaders. The report addresses the pipeline needed to strengthen one's administrative skills, resulting in a distributed leadership model where assistant principals contribute to and share school leadership responsibilities beyond day-to-day management and discipline."

Debra Paradowski
Associate Principal, Arrowhead Union High School, Hartland, Wisc.
NASSP National Assistant Principal of the Year, 2020

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